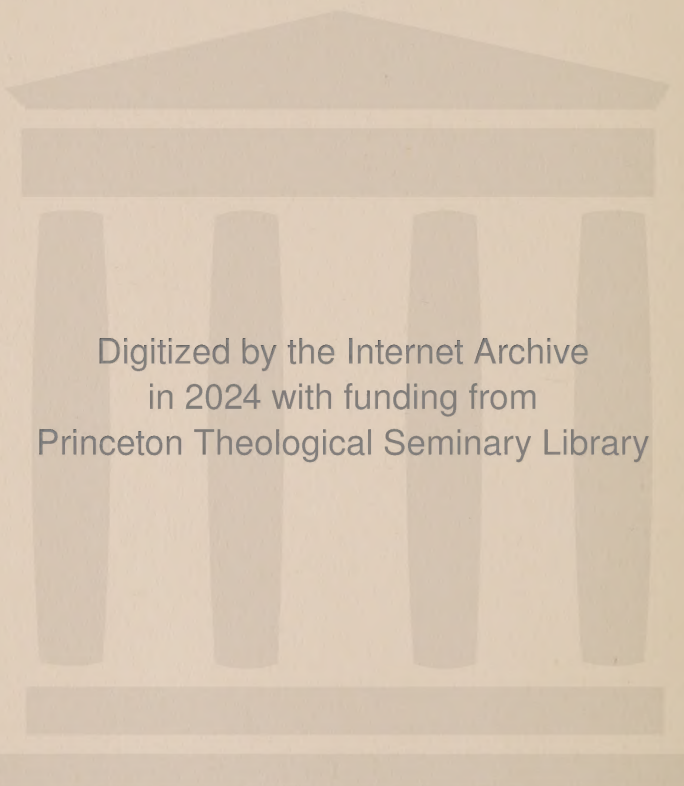


THE SETTLEMENT OF GERMAN
MENNONITES FROM RUSSIA

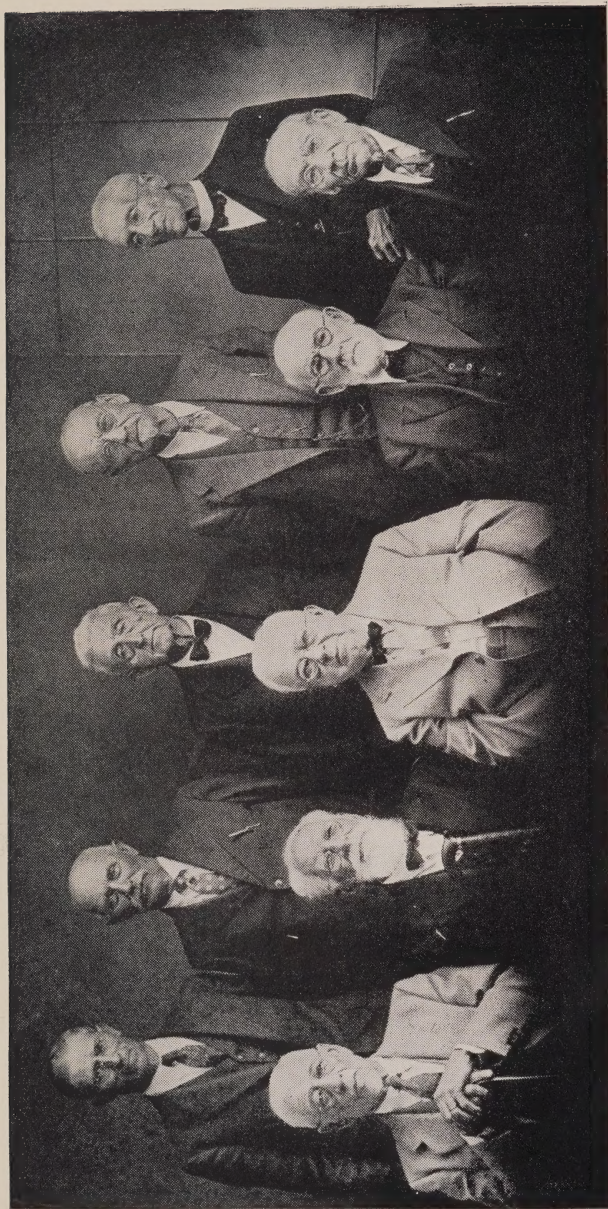
AT
MOUNTAIN LAKE
MINNESOTA



FERDINAND P. SCHULTZ



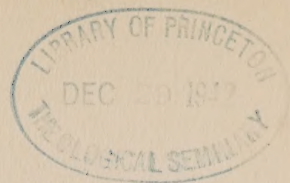
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| F. Balzer | A. Penner | S. Balzer | H. Friesen | G. Fast |

A GROUP OF PIONEER SETTLERS

*W. J. Toews came to the community from Russia in 1906 and can thus not properly be considered one of the early pioneers, but he is included in this picture because he served as secretary and treasurer for the Old Settlers Memorial Festival conducted by local pioneers on October 23, 1938.



**A HISTORY
OF
THE SETTLEMENT OF
GERMAN MENNONITES
FROM RUSSIA**

**AT
MOUNTAIN LAKE, MINNESOTA**

**BY
✓
FERDINAND P. SCHULTZ**

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PREFACE

In the year 1935-6 the writer was a member of Dr. Ernest S. Osgood's seminar course in "The History of the West Since 1865" in the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota. As a result of a private conference in January, 1936, Dr. Osgood assigned the writer a special topic dealing with the subject represented by the title of this book. Before the year was over the topic had developed into a possibility for a Master's thesis, but the work was laid aside for a year while the writer filled a teaching position in the Senior High School at Watertown, South Dakota. Work was resumed on the project in June, 1937, under the direction and guidance of Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, Superintendent of the Minnesota State Historical Society, and Professor of History at the University of Minnesota. The thesis was completed in December of that year in the midst of teaching duties at John Fletcher College, University Park, Iowa.

The thesis is now published in book form in order to make it readily available to all those who may be interested in its findings. In view of the fact that this treatise was primarily written to meet in part the requirements for an academic degree the writer sincerely hopes that it may be deemed a worthwhile contribution to historical knowledge by those readers who are concerned with history from an academic standpoint. Incidentally it is hoped that this bit of local history may be of genuine value and interest to those readers who are personally interested in the community treated, either directly as present or former inhabitants, or indirectly through other connections with the community or its people.

FERDINAND P. SCHULTZ
Mountain Lake, Minnesota
August, 1938.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the significant developments in the study and writing of American history during the past half century was an increased emphasis on the influence of the frontier in the development of the United States. Modern historians recognize the frontier as a vital factor in the development of our unique pattern of national and individual characteristics. And someone may even project the idea, with more than a grain of truth in it, that the frontier, more than any other influence, endowed America and Americans with those peculiar features and characteristics by which the world most readily identifies them.

The frontier did not become a subject of special study among American historians until after its disappearance had been officially announced by the Federal Bureau of Census in 1890. Three years later Frederick J. Turner aroused lasting interest and fruitful action among students and patrons of history, especially in the Middle West, by his time-honored essay on "The Significance of the Disappearance of the American Frontier"¹ which he read before the American Historical Association. In this treatise Turner boldly asserted that the frontier was not merely an imaginary line of demarcation for the advancing fringe of settlement based on density of population, but that it must be regarded as a place or scene of vital sociological, economic, and other changes and processes that have left a noticeable imprint on the American nation. The "Turner Thesis", as this pronouncement is commonly known, stimulated historians and students, Turner's own students in particular, to undertake research dealing with frontier history. The results and findings of these studies have generally substantiated Turner's thesis.

When the students of nearly a generation had produced their individual contributions to the study of the frontier, attempts were made to assemble and organize the findings. Frederic L. Paxson completed in 1924 the first synthesis of all the work thus far accomplished under the title, *History of the American Frontier*.²

1. Published in Turner's collection of essays on the frontier, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920).

2. New York (1924).

Other men confined their works to separate phases of frontier history. The following list of authors and titles is illustrative of this type of frontier study:- Solon J. Buck, *The Granger Movement*;³ George M. Stephenson, *The Political History of the Public Lands*;⁴ Ernest S. Osgood, *The Day of the Cattleman*;⁵ and Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains*.⁶ At the present time Mr. Osgood is conducting an important frontier study dealing with the history of Montana as a typical western frontier state. Next to this type of frontier study dealing with major phases of the frontier there are numerous treatments of lesser dimensions dealing with smaller phases of the field.

The work thus far completed has resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the frontier and its place in American history, but the picture is by no means complete. There is still a great need for the detailed study of the specific processes and influences of the frontier. One of the most promising sources for the filling of this need is the careful study of local history in the former frontier areas, a field of tremendous opportunity that has scarcely been touched aside from the valuable work of collecting and preserving source materials being done by county, state and regional historical societies and to some extent by public libraries and the history departments of colleges and universities. This type of research will be an attempt to make a microscopic study of the development of individual communities from the beginning of their settlement. Each completed study will constitute a cross-section of American society as represented in the particular community studied. Whenever a representative number of such studies shall have been made their collective findings will facilitate the synthesis of frontier history, and incidentally American history, from the ground up. The ultimate outcome of the whole procedure is expected to be a fuller, richer, more accurate and realistic account of the frontier and its role in our nation's development than is now possible. The major outlines of the picture may undergo little or no change at all, but the accurate presentation of the details of their background and setting should produce a marked improvement in perspective.

This paper represents an attempt to make a detailed study of a single community. No study was discovered that could serve as a set model for this particular undertaking. The method of

3. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1913).

4. Boston: R. G. Badger (1917).

5. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota (1929).

6. Boston: Ginn and Co. (1931).

procedure consisted mainly of the search for and exploration of accessible sources within the limitations of the time and means that were available, and the making of a simple record of the discoveries that were made. Although the study in its present form does not represent a complete exhaustion of the subject, it is nevertheless thus presented with the conviction that it constitutes an appreciable contribution to historical knowledge and understanding for the purposes stated above. Certainly it can serve as useful foundation material for the more specialized investigation of the same community or as a suggestive example for the study of other communities.

The community selected for this study is the Mennonite settlement centering in the village of Mountain Lake in Cottonwood County, Minnesota. This community is particularly suited for a study of this sort because the Mennonites constitute a distinct, fairly homogeneous group that is easily isolated for purposes of study without so great a departure from American type as to invalidate its study for the purposes indicated above. Like millions of other foreigners the Mennonites came to America in search of better homes, bringing with them their own faith, their own language and their own customs and manners. They have now lived in an American environment for about two generations without losing their identity in the stream of rapid American development, but they have not been wholly impervious to Americanizing influences, for they have been affected by their new surroundings to the extent that it is now more appropriate to designate them as "American" Mennonites rather than as "Russian" or "German" Mennonites.

Grateful acknowledgment is due to Dr. Ernest S. Osgood, at whose suggestion this study was undertaken, and to Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, for their stimulating interest, helpful advice, and sympathetic guidance which have in no small measure contributed to the inception, prosecution, and final completion of this first venture in historical research. The writer is deeply indebted to the aged pioneers of the Mountain Lake community whose memories sought to make the nigh-forgotten past come back to life again by recounting the events and incidents of their early life in Russia, of the long and perilous trek by land and sea to this side of the globe, and of the toil-filled, wearisome days of life begun anew within a foreign land.

CHAPTER I

A BRIEF RESUME OF GENERAL MENNONITE HISTORY

The Mennonites are a small Protestant denomination with a history that dates back to the second quarter of the sixteenth century, in the era of the Protestant Reformation. They derive their name from Menno Simon (1496-1561), a converted Roman Catholic priest who was the most prominent and influential of their early leaders in Holland. In the past four centuries they have spread from the countries of their origin, Holland, Switzerland and Germany, to nearly a dozen other countries on four continents. Today there are approximately 600,000 Mennonites in the world,¹ the largest number for any country being in the United States. Arranged in the descending order of their size other Mennonite groups are found in Russia, Holland, Canada, Germany, India, Switzerland, France, Poland, Mexico, Brazil and Paraguay.

Many Mennonite historians and a few other writers claim to trace Mennonite origins back to the Waldenses, a much persecuted sect of primitive Christians founded by Peter Waldo of Lyons on the Rhone river in the twelfth century. Being fearfully persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church and the temporal powers in northern Italy and southern France the Waldenses retreated to the rocky valleys of the Italian Alps where they survived to modern times. It is supposed that some of the Waldenses crossed the Alps into Switzerland and southern Germany and became the founders of the Anabaptist groups from which the Mennonites sprang. This supposition is not confirmed by authentic historical sources and is not generally accepted by church historians.

The earliest church that is linked with Mennonite origins was founded in January, 1525, at Zurich, Switzerland, by Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Georg Blaurock and others, two years after they had broken with the reformer, Zwingli, because they believed in the separation of the church and state and rejected infant bap-

1. This is a conservative estimate based on the following figures: The Mennonite historian, P. M. Friesen in *Die Alt-Evang. Mennonit. Bruderschaft in Russland* (1:776) places his conservative estimate of world Mennonite population at 400,000 in 1910. The German encyclopedia, *Meyer's Lexikon* (Leipzig, 1928), gives the figure of 516,000 for 1925. At the same rate of increase (29% in fifteen years) the Mennonites should number about 665,640 by 1940.

tism as unscriptural. Their practice of baptizing only adults upon public profession of conversion irrespective of previous baptism as infants caused them to be called "Taufers" or "Wieder-taufers", meaning "Baptists" and "Anabaptists", respectively. At about the same time similar groups developed in southern Germany. The prevalent adherence by Protestants as well as Catholics to the idea of exclusive and intolerant "state-churchism" inevitably brought persecution upon the Anabaptists as well as all other non-conformists wherever they appeared. The Anabaptists with few exceptions held to the practice of non-resistance, refusing absolutely to bear arms even in self-defense, while at the same time teaching obedience to civil authorities except in religious matters. Their quiet, firm refusal to conform to the state religion was often followed by martyrdom unless they fled from the country.

Some of the Anabaptists who fled from Switzerland or Germany to escape persecution came to the Low Countries where they were similarly persecuted by the Imperial Government of Charles V at the behest of the Roman Catholics and later the Reformed Churches. After the abdication of Charles persecution was even more severe under Phillip II until William of Orange won independence for the Dutch Netherlands and in 1577 decreed religious toleration. During these trying times thousands of Anabaptists suffered martyrdom for their faith,² but even the severest persecution could not stamp out the sect or wholly check its growth. It was during some of the darkest days of their hardship and suffering that they found their greatest leader, Menno Simon, whose importance in their history is suggested by the fact that a great many of them have since that time borne the name, "Mennonite", which was originally a derisive epithet applied to them by their enemies.

Menno Simon was born in 1496³ at the village of Witmarsum, Friesland, near the northern coast of Holland. His parents, who appear to have been farmers, educated him for the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. From his twenty-eighth year he served as priest of the church in the neighboring village of Pingjum until he was promoted to the larger church in his native village a few years before his conversion in 1536. According to Simon's own writings⁴ he lived a very pleasant care-free life of ease during

2. A record of these martyrdoms was made in 1660 by Thielem Jansz van Braght, *Het Bloedigh Tooneel der Doopsgesinde en Weerloose Christenen die om het getuygenisse Jesu . . . geleden hebben en gedoot zijn*. Dortrecht.

3. C. Krahn, *Menno Simons*, 16, note.

4. Menno Simon, "Renunciation of the Church of Rome", 1554. Found in *The Complete Works of Menno Simon*. English Translation. Elkhart, Indiana: John F. Funk and Brother (1871).

most of his priesthood days, giving no serious thought to anything in life except the duties required of him by the church. His first serious interest in religious questions began in his second or third year in the priesthood with the thought, which occurred to him during an observance of the mass, that the bread and wine were not literally changed into the flesh and blood of Christ as is claimed by the Catholic Church. From that time on he secretly studied the Bible in an effort to satisfy his curiosity. His life went on as before until he was profoundly impressed in 1531 by the martyrdom of an Anabaptist named Sicke Freriks at Leeuwarden. He was especially disturbed by the strange idea that this man had given up his life because he believed in adult baptism, so he endeavored to discover the truth as to the proper mode of baptism. Careful study of the writings of the contemporary reformers, Luther, Bucer, and Bullinger, failed to remove his doubts concerning infant baptism because he found no basis in the Bible for its practice. After several years of painstaking study of the Bible Simon concluded that the Roman Catholic Church had departed from the teachings of the Bible and began to preach the doctrines of the Anabaptists in his own church in Witmarsum. Nine months later, in 1536, he renounced all connections with the Roman Catholic Church, accepted baptism, and was ordained to the ministry by the Anabaptist leader, Obbe Philips.

Simon soon became the foremost leader of the Anabaptists in Holland and Northern Germany. He traveled widely in these regions, preaching and organizing new churches. His keen intellect, skill in public speech and debate, and his high degree of learning won for him not only the ardent admiration of his friends, but also the respect of his enemies. By 1543 Simon had become so influential in spreading the Anabaptist doctrines that the Imperial Government declared him an outlaw and set a price on his head. Simon fled for his life, narrowly escaping capture and certain death many times, and after some perilous wanderings found a secure refuge under the protection of Count Alefeld of Fresenburg, Holstein, in Northern Germany, where he spent much of his time until his death in 1561, the sixty-sixth year of his life. To a limited extent Simon continued to travel about and preach in spite of the great danger from persecution, but the work of greatest permanent value was the committing of his teachings to writing in the form of books, pamphlets, tracts and personal letters. Fortunately most of these and earlier works were published on a printing press placed at his disposal by his generous host. His friends and followers distributed his writings wherever they went, thus perpet-

uating and extending his influence as the dominant leader of the Anabaptists who gradually became known as the Mennonites after 1550.⁵

Menno Simon is not as well known as the other protestant leaders of his time, but he deserves higher recognition than he generally receives for his success in impressing his name, his personality and his teachings upon a religious movement that has shown remarkable tenacity and success in maintaining its identity for four centuries in widely separated areas of the world. With no powerful ruler to champion his cause, with no state to sanction and shelter his church, and in the face of determined opposition from both state and church he stood for some advanced principles and ideas that failed to gain general acceptance because they were too radical for the time. Some of these were: democracy in church organization which included autonomy for the individual church; rejection of infant baptism and insistence on adult baptism only upon public profession of conversion; the complete separation of church and state; complete abstention from the use of military force for any purpose whatever, a type of pacifism whose universal adoption would speedily eliminate war. In his relation to the reform movement as a whole Simon was a moderate leftist, for his reform program was one of the most radical departures from the Roman Catholic right, but his radicalism was well seasoned with reason and moderation and was free from the fanatical excesses of such groups as the Munsterites, who perished in their own folly.⁶

The Mennonites in Holland multiplied rapidly after Menno Simon's death in 1561 in spite of numerous divisions resulting largely from disputes over questions of church discipline and such non-essentials as the wearing of beards, buttons and collars. In the early part of the seventeenth century most of the separated groups were re-united through a series of conferences, the most important one being the Conference of Dort in 1632, where they drew up the Dort Confession which is the most important and the most generally recognized statement of the Mennonite creed. After the Dutch government granted them full toleration in 1577 the thrifty and industrious Mennonites soon attained such a high level of economic prosperity and wealth that they often advanced huge sums to the government in times of great need. In contrast to the predominantly rural character of the Mennonites generally the

5. Some of Menno's followers have declined to call themselves Mennonites because they did not wish to be named after a man. In Holland they have borne the name, "Doopsgezinde", which literally means "Baptist-minded".

6. C. Krahn, *Menno Simons*, 24-31.

Dutch group has always been distinctly urban and has reached a higher educational and cultural level. They have developed a highly trained paid clergy.

In England the Mennonites never became established as a denomination, but the few who came into the country were not unimportant. In response to an invitation extended by King Henry VIII a number of Flemish Mennonites who were skilled weavers came to England and became connected with the great weaving industry. Although they were not permitted publicly to practice or propagate their own faith, they became significantly identified with the early history of the English Baptist movement.⁷

During the severe persecutions in the middle of the sixteenth century many Dutch Mennonites fled to regions in West and East Prussia, particularly in the area along the Vistula River now known as the Polish Corridor. The tradesmen and artisans settled in the city of Danzig and other centers such as Graudenz, Marienwerder, Konigsburg and Marienburg where their typical Dutch business acumen soon brought them prosperity. The majority, however, were typical Dutch farmers skilled in the art of wresting fruitful agricultural lands from the sea by means of dikes and canals. Along the banks of the Vistula they found vast areas of unoccupied swamp lands which were unprofitable and useless to the nobles controlling them, until they were reclaimed and developed by the Mennonites. After the nobles, who were mostly descendants of the German Order of Teutonic Knights, realized the economic value of these industrious Dutch farmers they offered very generous terms and privileges in an effort to attract as many of them as possible. Among the inducements offered were freedom of religion, full control of their own schools and churches, exemption from military service and the privilege of substituting a simple affirmation for the oath. To the Dutch immigrants were added small groups of Mennonites from the other central European countries, where they were being persecuted.

The life of the Mennonites in Prussia was not always rosy. Their fortunes varied with the changing times and vagaries and dispositions of their overlords and rulers. At times they enjoyed unhindered development of their settlements and sometimes acquired great wealth. At other times they experienced extreme hardship and oppression. In times of war their young men were often impressed into the armies of the nobles, or they had to pay huge sums of money for military exemption, or were compelled to pay other assessments, which were often confiscatory. The acquisition

7. *Religious Bodies*, 1926, 77, 842-3.

of wealth by the Mennonites frequently aroused the jealousy of their less thrifty neighbors who brought all manner of false accusations against them to induce the government to confiscate and divide their property or even to banish them from the country. Such extreme measures seldom succeeded because there were usually enough nobles favorably disposed to block them. The Lutheran clergy frequently induced the ruling powers to enact restrictive measures against them because the Mennonites were remarkably successful in converting many Lutherans to their faith, sometimes winning over entire congregations. Before the partition of Poland by Russia, Austria and Prussia most of the Mennonite settlements were under Polish control. After the first partition of Poland in 1772 nearly all the Polish territories containing Mennonite settlements were under the rule of the Prussian Hohenzollerns. The enlightened liberality of Frederick the Great in renewing all of their privileges promised an unrivaled era of freedom for the Mennonites, but their expectations were shortlived, for the rapidly growing militarism of the latter part of the eighteenth century led to restrictions that promised to exterminate the strictly non-resistant Mennonite faith in Prussia. The Mennonites refused to render military service; the Prussian government forbade emigration. The situation looked hopeless, but out of it came the great trek of Mennonites to the wild steppes of Southern Russia, there to start life all over again.⁸

Emigration seemed to offer the only hope of escape from the trying situation in which the Prussian Mennonites had been placed by the demands of the ruling powers and they began to look for a new home where they might freely enjoy the liberties which meant so much to them. Among the possibilities America seemed the most promising, but it was suddenly overshadowed by the unparalleled opportunities offered to them by Catharine II of Russia. This great despot had acquired from the Turks vast areas of land toward the South which extended the borders of Russia to the Black Sea. These regions were for the most part large uncultivated and treeless plains, or "steppes", inhabited by a sparse population of roving semi-savage Tartars who were of no economic value to the Empire. Desiring to develop these new lands as quickly as possible and civilize the nomadic Tartars, Catherine offered very liberal inducements for settlement in Russia to industrious farmers in other countries, especially Germany. In 1786 she sent a special envoy to the Prussian Mennonites with an invitation to make their new

8. C. Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, Ch. 1.

homes in Russia, promising them all the privileges and liberties which they had ever enjoyed in any other country. After two special deputies had made a favorable report of their investigation of the lands offered for settlement, the Mennonites accepted the invitation and a group of about 230 families began the long trek to the new home in 1788. By 1840 about 6000,⁹ approximately one-half, of the Prussian Mennonites had moved to Russia, the rest remaining in Prussia because they did not wish to undergo the hardships of pioneer life, or because the government either refused permission to emigrate with their property or made their stay more tolerable.

From the time of their arrival until about 1870 the Mennonites in Russia presented a paradoxical situation: the Mennonite colonies were highly democratic societies that flourished under the friendly protection of one of the most despotic governments in the world. The charter of privileges granted to the Mennonites by Catherine II and confirmed by her successors included the following provisions and guarantees: 1. Full religious liberty with one restriction: they were forbidden to propagate their faith among the native Russians; 2. Perpetual exemption from military service; 3. Perpetual grant of 65 dessiatin of land (about 175 acres) to every immigrant family for its possession and use, the title remaining with the Crown; 4. The free use of Crown forests; 5. Tax exemption for ten years, and no taxes thereafter except an annual fee of 15 kopeks per dessiatin (about seven and one half cents); 6. Monopoly of the distilleries and breweries within their colonies; 7. Free transportation from Prussia to their new homes in Russia; 8. A loan of 500 rubles (about \$250) to each family and support until the harvesting of the first crop; 9. Complete control over their own churches and schools; 10. Almost complete autonomy in local government in which the individual had no direct dealings with any Russian officials.¹⁰ Their only connection with the Imperial Government existed in the form of a commission known as the "Fuersorge-Komitee" stationed at Odessa which administered all affairs affecting the Mennonite colonies. The Mennonite colonies made many of their own laws, they had their own courts, and all their officials were elected by the town meeting composed of all the landholders. The organization of the Mennonite society was a combination of capitalism, socialism, and theocracy. Each individual had full property rights and all heads of families were entitled to a farm each, but the division of the

9. Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, 17.

10. Anonymous, *Die Mennoniten-Gemeinden in Russland während der Kriegs und Revolutionsjahre*, 1914-20, 14-22.

land, the administration of the remaining communal land, and the acquisition of additional land for their children were under the control of the colony as a whole. The individual landholder could not sell his land, for the title remained with the crown; he could only sell his right of possession and use with the buildings and improvements. Each colony maintained a system of mutual fire and theft insurance and institutions for the care of orphans, the aged, the deaf and dumb, the insane, and the sick (ordinary hospital). An element of theocracy was introduced as a result of two facts: the rights and benefits of the Privilegium could be extended only to Mennonites, members of the Mennonite church; the popularly elected unpaid preachers were usually the wealthiest and most influential men in their churches and communities.

In 1871 the prosperous and peaceful existence of the Mennonites was unexpectedly disturbed by the rumor that Alexander II was planning to reorganize and strengthen Russia's military forces by introducing universal military service. This new threat to their three-centuries-old principle of non-resistance caused grave concern among the Mennonites, who immediately sent a commission to St. Petersburg to secure official Imperial verification or denial of the vague report. In two years of patient negotiating and petitioning they not only discovered that they would be subject to military service, but they were also informed that they would most likely lose practically all their special privileges under the new plan adopted by the once liberal but now increasingly reactionary Alexander II to thoroughly Russianize all the non-Russian residents of the country. The Mennonite leaders realized that the proposed changes would cause the ultimate extinction of their faith, the reduction of their advanced social, cultural, moral, and economic status to the much lower native level, and the eventual loss of their identity by their absorption into the preponderant Russian majority. Their unwillingness to accept the new conditions left them with only one alternative: emigration.¹¹

Alexander positively refused to make any modification in his program to appease the Mennonites, but he granted them permission to leave the country before 1880 if they wished to do so. No doubt the Czar reasoned that these people would not esteem the principles of their faith worth the sacrifice and hardships involved in leaving their prosperous settlements to find new homes in some distant land, but he was mistaken on this point, for the Menno-

11. *Ibid.*, 21.

nites began to leave the country in considerable numbers in 1874. When Alexander realized the possibility of losing all of these industrious people, who had become the model farmers of the empire, he sought to stem the tide of emigration by means of propaganda designed to contrast the bright side of their future in Russia with the dark side of emigration. He further offered to let the Mennonites substitute an independent forest service for the military service required under the new laws. Alexander's modification bore fruit, for over two thirds of the Mennonites decided to remain in the land of the Czars.¹²

In spite of the loss of nearly one third of their number by emigration to America and the abridgement of their liberties under the new Imperial policy, the Mennonites continued to prosper and expand until the Revolution of 1917 and the Soviet regime brought calamity upon them. Most of them were classified with the "kulaks" because of their cultural and economic advancement and suffered the fate common to that class of Russian farmers under the new economic order. Their refusal to conform to the religious demands of the Soviets has brought upon them persecution as severe as any that is known in Mennonite history. It is impossible to determine how many Mennonites now live in Russia as compared with their population of about 100,000 at the time of the World War,¹³ for thousands lost their lives in 1917-20 when their colonies were the battleground of the "Reds" and the "Whites" as well as the scene of pillage and murder by irresponsible bands of marauders.¹⁴ Many others have since lost their lives through the hardships imposed by the rigorous religious and economic demands of the new order. Despite Soviet restriction of emigration about 22,000 Mennonites have left Russia since 1917 and found new homes in North and South America,¹⁵ the largest number going to Canada.

The Mennonites who still remain in Russia face a well-nigh hopeless future. The land of peace, freedom, and plenty has become to them a locked prison where the inexorable master exacts conformity and acquiescence at the point of the bayonet. Every faith, except Communism, must be swept out of the land. Many have died rather than part with their faith.

12. P. M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evang. Mennonit. Bruderschaft in Russland*, 1:498; 2:57. The emigrants numbered about 15,000 out of a total Mennonite population of about 45,000 living in Russia at that time.

13. *Ibid.*, 1:776.

14. A good account of these events is to be found in *Die Mennoniten-Gemeinden in Russland* - - - - 1914-1920, 49-104.

15. Abram Kroeker, *My Flight from Russia*, 87 note.

America has been the home of the Mennonites for about three centuries. The first Mennonites to live in America came from Holland in 1632 and settled on the banks of the Delaware River. Their settlement was destroyed in 1664 when England acquired the Dutch colonies in America.¹⁶ In 1683 a group of German Mennonites together with other German settlers founded Germantown near Philadelphia in response to the generous invitation of William Penn to the persecuted peoples of Europe to establish new homes in his recently acquired domains where they were to enjoy religious freedom. In the next one hundred and fifty years large numbers of German and Swiss Mennonites found homes in Pennsylvania, many of them going to the frontier where they lived on unusually good terms with the Indians. Many of the Mennonites moved westward with the frontier into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and other states. Loyalty to the British King and conscientious scruples against living under a government established by revolution caused a considerable group to move to Ontario in Canada after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War.¹⁷

The Pennsylvania Mennonites, who were predominantly of Swiss origin, constitute a substantial element in the "Pennsylvania Dutch" population that has contributed so much to the development of that great state. The early settlers around Germantown early distinguished themselves by their contributions to the economic and cultural development of Pennsylvania. In 1688 they drafted the first formal protest in America against the slave trade in which the Quakers engaged without pronounced scruples.¹⁸ They were associated with German settlers in the printing of the first Bible in America in 1743, artisans among them shared in the founding of the woolen and linen industries of Pennsylvania, and a small group of Mennonites accomplished in 1748 the colossal task of translating and printing in English the Dutch Mennonite Book of Martyrs.¹⁹

The next important accession to the Mennonite population of America was the immigration of the German Mennonites from Russia in 1873-80. A group of twelve deputies was sent to America in 1873 to find land suitable for settlement.²⁰ Upon their return in the fall of the year with a generally favorable report concerning the frontier regions that they had carefully examined from Manitoba

16. P. M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evang. Mennonit. Bruderschaft* - - - - - , 2:109.

17. *Ibid.*, 2:113.

18. *Ibid.*, 2:113.

19. *Ibid.*, 2:54.

20. *Ibid.*, 2:54.

to Texas, large numbers of their people made preparations to follow in the next year the example of about 35 families from the Crimea who had already departed for America in the summer. The prompt exodus of 6000 to 7000 Mennonites in 1874 induced Alexander II to make the above-stated concessions ²¹ which markedly checked the emigration movement, but by 1880, the end of the period within which Mennonites were permitted to leave Russia, approximately 15,000 of them went to America where they settled in Manitoba, Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, and Minnesota. ²² Again the Mennonite farmers proved to be excellent pioneers for in a few years they transformed wild prairies into prosperous communities with well-kept farms, churches, schools, and villages. With the rapid increase in population all of the original settlements have either expanded into adjoining territory or witnessed the emigration of the excess population to other western states and provinces.

America has been the most permanently hospitable haven of refuge for the Mennonites in their long quest for religious liberty. With few exceptions those who came to American shores have remained and prospered. ²³ North America today contains about one-half of the Mennonite population of the world, the 300,000 or more American Mennonites ²⁴ being scattered in groups of various sizes in over twenty states of the Union and four or five Canadian provinces.

21. *Ibid.*, 1:498; 2:57.

22. *Ibid.*, 2:57 note.

23. During and immediately after the World War a few small groups of ultra-conservative Mennonites left Canada and the United States for military reasons and settled in Mexico and South America.

24. P. M. Friesen estimated the American Mennonite population at about 200,000 in 1910 (*Alt-Evang. Mennonit. Bruderschaft*, 1:776). *Meyer's Lexikon* (Leipzig, 1928) sets the figure at 303,000.

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF THE FIRST MENNONITE SETTLERS

The Mennonite settlement at Mountain Lake, Minnesota, was established by about one thousand eight hundred¹ of the 15,000 Mennonites who came to America from Russia in 1873-80. In the sixty-two years that have elapsed since those memorable days the vast majority of the immigrant settlers have departed from the scenes of this life and with them has died much of the first-hand knowledge of the immigrant and pioneer days, but fortunately an appreciable number of the old pioneers have survived this long span of years. Valuable contributions from their rich store of memories together with materials gathered here and there from a large variety of written sources have made possible a reasonably connected and intelligible account of how the Mennonites found their way to the state of Minnesota and the community where they settled.

The story goes back to the days in 1871 when the peaceful and prosperous Mennonite colonies in Russia were suddenly disturbed by rumors that the colonists were to be subjected to military service and a program of Russianization. With their minds still fresh with memories of the long trek to escape similar threats to their liberties in Prussia it was natural for them to think of emigration to a new land of promise as a possible way out of their difficulties, and so they began to look about for a new home where they might enjoy the liberties they held dear. America apparently offered the greatest and most attractive opportunities, for no other region of the world seems to have been given very serious consideration. Minnesota was one of the first of the American regions to become known to them as a prospective home, for in a petition for information about Canada presented on January 13, 1872, to the British Consul Schrab at Berdiansk on the Sea of Azov they stated that "they had received a pamphlet in the German language on Minne-

1. John P. Rempel, "Statistisches über unsere Ansiedlung", *Jubiläumsfeier zum Andenken an das Fünfzigjährige Bestehen der Mennonitischen Ansiedlung von Mountain Lake, Minnesota*, 41-45. This volume, which also contains essays by other local pioneers, will hereafter be cited as *Jubiläumsfeier*.

sota with good information about that state".² Very likely this pamphlet was a copy of a little booklet entitled *Minnesota Als Eine Heimat Fur Einwanderer* published in 1865, 1869, and 1870 by the State Board of Immigration as a part of its extensive campaign for immigrants³ in the post-Civil War days of rapid expansion in settlement and railroad-building. A considerable number of these pamphlets were distributed in Germany in 1870-1 by A. Wolff, a full-time agent of the Board stationed in the seaport Bremen.⁴ One or two copies of this pamphlet were probably sent to the Mennonites in Russia by friends or relatives in Germany, for the former had kept in touch with those who chose to remain in their old home rather than undertake the long trek to the land of the Czars.

The next contact between the Mennonites and Minnesota occurred in the summer or fall of 1872 when three sons of wealthy Mennonite farmers, Bernhard Warkentin, Philip Wiebe, and Peter Dyck, made an independent trip of adventure to America under the leadership of Jacob Boehr, an older acquaintance from the German Palatinate who was an experienced traveler.⁵ Little is known of their adventures in America except that they visited many of the American Mennonite settlements and traveled through some of the western and frontier states between the Mississippi River and the Great Plains.⁶ A tardy reference to the group in the *Duluth Minnesotian* of June 7, 1873, indicates that they visited Minnesota in the fall of 1872.

It will be remembered that last fall a committee of this sect visited Minnesota in search of a home for a colony of 40,000 of their number, and that they remained in Duluth for a day or two. That committee, after examining different sections of Minnesota, went to other States and afterwards returned home.

The return of the young travelers to Russia in the fall of 1872 had a marked influence on the emigration movement among their people. Their enthusiastic reports dispelled most of their erroneous and unfavorable impressions concerning America. One of the leaders of the emigration movement, Leonhard Sudermann, states, for

2. Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-80.", *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 6:211, note (October, 1932).
3. Theodore C. Blegen, "Minnesota's Campaign for Immigrants", *Yearbook of the Swedish Historical Society of America*, 11:3-83 (1926).
4. A. Wolff, Bremen, Germany, to the State Board of Immigration, Sept. 7, 1871, in the State of Minnesota Governor's Archives, Box 608, Immigration Papers for 1870-1.
5. C. H. Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, 50-1.
6. Georg Leibbrandt, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 7:5-6 (January, 1933).

example, that they thought of America as a land that was "interesting for adventurers, a refuge for criminals".⁷ How could anyone expect to find a peaceful home in such a country? Daring people with their pockets full of revolvers might venture to live amongst the raw savages and criminals, but a peace-loving, non-resistant people such as they were could not hope to find a suitable home there.⁷ Eye-witnesses now not only proved these ideas to be false, but made America so attractive that no other land was thereafter considered as a possible home.

Throughout the fall of 1872 and in the following winter the sentiment in favor of emigration to America grew rapidly, especially when repeated petitions to the Czar for the moderation of his new military program failed to move him. Early in the spring of 1873 a conference of Mennonite leaders selected out of their midst twelve deputies who were to journey to America for the purpose of investigating the conditions and opportunities for settlement in the different states and provinces of the United States and Canada.⁸ They were unwilling to undertake a mass emigration with its tremendous financial sacrifices until they were certain that America could give them the freedom and liberty which they desired.

In the meantime there had developed in America a great deal of interest in the proposed Mennonite exodus from Russia to America. Figuratively speaking, the empire-building, settler-hungry frontier, upon beholding this choice morsel of prospective immigrants, licked its chops, and began to stalk its prey. The western newspapers, railroads, governments and other agencies interested in westward expansion were struck with the novelty and the possibilities of this mass-movement of capable, fairly wealthy, and well-organized immigrants and immediately proceeded with plans and schemes to draw them into the orbit of their influence. The first campaign to attract the Mennonites as settlers was begun by the Canadian Government early in 1872, partly as a result of several Mennonite petitions to the British Consul at Berdiansk, Russia, for information about Canada.⁹ This campaign gave early promise of success because of the consistency with which liberal inducements were offered. The next contender to enter the race was the state government of Minnesota with more or less cooperation from the land-grant railways within its borders. Other vigorous rivals were

7. Leonhard Sudermann, *Eine Deputationsreise von Russland nach Amerika*, 7.

8. G. Leibbrandt in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 7:5-6.

9. *Ibid.*, 6:211.

Dakota Territory, the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe Railway in Kansas, and the Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy Railway in Nebraska.

It was natural for Minnesota to take an active interest in the Mennonites as prospective settlers, for in the fifteenth year of its statehood nearly two-thirds of its area still lay west and north of the frontier line,¹⁰ and the great majority of its half million inhabitants resided in the southeastern corner of the state.¹¹ From this settled area the growing commercial and industrial interests and the railroads, which had a total mileage of nearly two thousand in 1872,¹² were slowly reaching out to tap the natural wealth of the land, but their success was dependent upon the coming of settlers to make the raw materials available and furnish a market for the finished goods. With typical frontier enthusiasm and optimism each new settler and every new business concern became a booster for the territory or state, every possible effort was made to attract the stream of foreign immigration to the state.¹³ During the middle or later sixties the state government placed its campaign for immigrants on an official basis by establishing a Board of Immigration which prepared advertising literature and employed special agents who were located in strategic cities along the main routes of immigrant travel between Europe and Minnesota and sought by every possible means to direct the stream of home-seekers to the unoccupied lands of Minnesota.

The central figure in Minnesota's campaign to win the Mennonites as settlers was William Seeger, State Treasurer and Secretary of the Board of Immigration during Governor Austin's administration. Seeger was well fitted for dealing with the Mennonites because he had lived in both Germany and Russia. He was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1810, and lived in that country until he went to Moscow, Russia, in 1836, where he was engaged in the banking and export business for fourteen years. In 1850 he moved to America, locating first at Cincinnati, Ohio, and six years later in Minnesota. In 1856 he was associated with Colonel Pfaender in the establishment of a German colony at New Ulm, Minnesota. After serving in the Ninth Minnesota Regiment in the Civil War he was engaged in business until he became State Treasurer and Secretary of the Board of Immigration in 1872. During this year

10. W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 3: 6, map showing frontier line of 1870.

11. E. v. D. Robinson, *Economic History of Agriculture in Minnesota*, 63, map showing distribution of population in Minnesota in 1870.

12. *Ibid.*, 36, graph showing progress of railroad construction in Minnesota, 1862-1912.

13. See T. C. Blegen's "Minnesota's Campaign for Immigrants."

he began his activity in connection with the Mennonite immigration. After his impeachment and removal from office in the spring of 1873 ¹⁴ he continued his association with the Mennonites as special agent of the Board of Immigration ¹⁵ until the close of the Austin Administration and then for several years as an agent of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railway.¹⁶

Seeger's first contact with the Mennonites occurred undoubtedly in 1872 when the above-mentioned four Mennonite adventurers traveled through Minnesota on their unofficial investigation of America. He must have obtained from them considerable information about their people and the names of some of their leading men. The *St. Paul Daily Press* of January 26, 1873, published an editorial and an article which, in addition to giving very comprehensive information about the Mennonites and their proposed emigration from Russia to America, stated that Seeger had been corresponding with several of their leaders concerning the merits of Minnesota as a new home for their people. One of the correspondents mentioned by name was Bernhard Warkentin "of Illinois", who was one of the four travelers referred to above. When his partners returned to Russia in the fall of 1872, he remained in America and was for some time resident in Illinois. At this stage of developments he was evidently the principal intermediary between Seeger and his other Mennonite correspondents, and was very likely the source of most of the information about the Mennonites published by the *St. Paul Daily Press* at this time.

In this same issue of the *St. Paul Daily Press* (January 26, 1873) were published some excerpts from one or two of the letters received by Seeger from his Mennonite correspondents. The most important of these excerpts came from a letter written by D. Goerz, a Mennonite school teacher living in Berdiansk, Russia, and sent to Seeger through Warkentin. The portion of the letter published is of considerable interest here because it indicates the extent of the Mennonites' interest in Minnesota and also reveals that Canada was at that time Minnesota's most serious rival in the contest for these immigrants.

14. A complete account of Seeger's impeachment is found in W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 3, appendix.

15. Horace Austin, "Fourth Annual Message to the Legislature of Minnesota", Ja. 9, 1874. Found in *Governors Messages, 1857-74*, St. Paul.

16. Seeger was named as agent of the company in an advertisement appearing in *Zur Heimath*, May, 1875, a paper edited and published at Summerfield, Illinois, by a Mennonite immigrant named David Goerz.

According to Goerz many of the Mennonites were very favorably impressed with Minnesota through the reading of a pamphlet entitled "Minnesota as a Homestead for Immigrants", but Canada was regarded with much greater favor because of the liberal inducements offered. A Canadian commissioner had visited them in Russia in August (1872) and offered to pay the expenses of a deputation to Canada, and to furnish other aids and facilities for their settlement in Canada. Further, the Canadian Government had made very liberal promises in regard to their religious principles which were more important to them than economic considerations. Canada had promised, for example, to exempt them from military services by special legislation and not by the payment of commutation money, as was possible in the United States. Aside from these special inducements, however, Minnesota seemed to be more attractive. Goerz writes, "I assure you, my dear sir, that your beautiful State finds many and warm admirers among us. I may even be justified in stating that it would be preferred, if it would offer the same inducements as Canada."

According to the accompanying editorial comment the Mennonites were regarded as a very desirable class of immigrants for whose attraction to the state immediate steps should be taken by the State Legislature to neutralize the liberal Canadian inducements. Canadian papers are quoted to the effect that the Mennonites number 80,000 and that "the Canadians hope to employ them as laborers on the projected Canadian Pacific railway". The editor seemed to be very confident that "the well-known tendency of emmigration [sic] to follow isothermal lines" would bring to Minnesota a large share of these immigrants, but their settlement in Canada would "suit us nearly as well", for they would settle in a "region which geographical conditions render inevitably tributary to Minnesota". Should they later tire of their frigid Canadian abode, and wish to move to the warmer side of the border, "they would have but to yoke their reindeers to their sledges and slide down to the lap of freedom".

Seeger was not content with his own efforts to bring the Mennonites to Minnesota through his correspondence and the sending of published literature. He sought to enlist the interest and aid of the railroads by submitting to them the correspondence he had received from the Mennonites.¹⁷ Most important of all he turned to the Governor and the State Legislature who alone could enact

17. *St. Paul Daily Press*, Jan. 26, 1873.

measures that could successfully counteract the effect of the liberal Canadian inducements. The railroad companies were slow in taking up the cause, but the government responded almost immediately, although not to the extent desired.

The first result of Seeger's efforts to interest the State Government in the Mennonites was a special message by Governor Austin to the State Legislature on January 29, 1873. Seeger must have been disappointed with this message for it manifested only mild gubernatorial interest in the Mennonites and contained no specific recommendations as to what ought to be done to induce them to settle in the state. Austin shifted the responsibility to the Legislature with these words: "I shall be ready to cooperate with you in any efforts you may devise.....". With the message were enclosed a communication from Seeger and several letters he had received from the Mennonites.¹⁸

About three weeks later the Legislature passed without debate and by a unanimous vote "A Joint Resolution on the Subject of Immigration". This document instructed the State Board of Immigration

to invite the Mennonites to settle within the limits of the state of Minnesota, and to assure them that they will receive a hearty welcome by the people of Minnesota, and that the legislature will endeavor to secure them the largest religious and political privileges allowed under the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the state of Minnesota; and to render them all reasonable aid and protection during their transit from Russia to the state of Minnesota.¹⁹

This resolution was the beginning and the end of the Legislature's action on the subject of Mennonite immigration. Apparently the Minnesota legislators were unwilling to bind the Government to any definite commitments or promises such as the Canadian Government had made to the Mennonites. Perhaps they had such great faith in the natural charms and attractions of the state that special inducements seemed unnecessary. Their interest in immigration appears to have been at a low ebb in that year, for in his next annual message to the Legislature Governor Austin deplored the fact that no appropriation of funds had been made in 1873 for use in the encouragement of immigration, and that the work of the Board of Immigration had been greatly restricted thereby.²⁰

18. State of Minnesota, *Journal of the Senate* (1873), 75.

19. *Ibid.*, 126-7; also *Journal of the House* (1873), 151, 158-9.

20. Horace Austin, "Fourth Annual Message to the Legislature of Minnesota". *Governor's Messages*, 1874.

Seeger undoubtedly continued his efforts to attract the Mennonites to Minnesota, for he learned in advance of the coming of the twelve official deputies who were to investigate the opportunities for colonization in the United States and Canada. In the early spring, however, his immigration activities were interrupted and for a time actually terminated by his impeachment, trial and removal from office on charges of misconduct in his responsibility as State Treasurer. His removal from this office automatically removed him from membership in the Board of Immigration. Governor Austin retained his confidence in Seeger in spite of the proceedings against him, and because of his valuable services in connection with immigration appointed him as agent of the Board of Immigration with the Mennonites as his special responsibility.²¹

The twelve deputies selected to investigate America left Russia in several separate groups in the latter part of April, 1873, and arrived at New York about a month later. They spent about two and one half months in their itinerary of investigation on the North American continent, most of the time traveling in small groups of two or more men, but occasionally uniting for the joint inspection of certain proposed sites for settlement. Usually the different groups were accompanied by agents or officials of the governments, railroads and land companies that had interests in the regions which they examined.

They began their itinerary by traveling westward in several groups and by different routes through the older Mennonite settlements in Ontario, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. All of the groups passed through St. Paul, Minnesota, on June 5-7, continuing immediately to Fargo, North Dakota, over the Northern Pacific Railroad via Duluth, Minnesota. From Fargo all the groups proceeded by steamboat down the Red River to Winnipeg, Manitoba, from which point they made several joint excursions into an area of eight or more townships which the Canadian Government offered to reserve for the Mennonites. Upon their return to Fargo on July 6 they broke up again into smaller groups that moved southward and examined the best available agricultural areas in practically all of the states and territories along the frontier line of that time, namely, Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Texas. By the end of August most of the men had started on their return journey to Russia to report to their people the results of their extensive investigations. Fortunately one of

21. *Ibid.*

the twelve deputies, Leonhard Sudermann, who was a member of the group that investigated Minnesota's opportunities for settlement, published in later years a day by day account of the entire journey from Russia to America and return. This account,²² which was based on the detailed notes made by Sudermann enroute, makes possible a fairly detailed description of the Mennonite inspection of Minnesota.

Seeger was prepared to meet the Mennonite delegations when they first came to St. Paul, June 5-7, 1873, on their way to Manitoba. During their brief stay in the city Seeger conferred with them for the purpose of making plans for their tour of inspection through the state after their return from Manitoba. The Northern Pacific Railroad, over whose lines the deputies had to travel as far as Fargo on their way to Manitoba, arranged that J. B. Power of the company's Land Department should meet them at Duluth and escort them on their way to Fargo. Upon their return to Fargo after their visit to Manitoba they were to examine the unsettled areas in the upper Minnesota River Valley and on the lines of the Winona & St. Peter and the St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad lines.²³

Sudermann's party arrived in St. Paul on June 7, too late to take part in the conferences with Seeger, and also reached Duluth too late for the meeting with J. B. Power. On the trip from St. Paul to Duluth Sudermann was fascinated by the great variety in the scenery, which became more interesting as they moved north.²⁴ Upon their arrival in Duluth on Saturday evening, June 7, they visited the large Northern Pacific immigrant house and saw masses of ice piled up on the shores of Lake Superior which explained the low temperature of that vicinity as compared to St. Paul. They were told that Duluth was only four years old and had a population of five-thousand five-hundred inhabitants. Sunday was a rainy, dreary day. They attended the morning service in the Lutheran Church. On Monday, another dismal rainy day, it took them all day to travel to Moorhead. Heavy rains had washed away the roadbed at several places, so much so in one place that a train wreck was barely avoided.

After crossing the Red River to Fargo Sudermann and his party met the rest of their fellow deputies. During the next two days the whole group went with J. B. Power on a tour into Dakota

22. *Eine Deputationsreise von Russland nach Amerika*, Elkhart, Indiana, 1897.

23. St. Paul Daily Press, Jan. 26, 1873.

24. This account of the investigation of Minnesota by the official Mennonite deputation is based wholly on Sudermann's record, except when other sources are cited.

to examine some of the lands of the Northern Pacific Railroad. On Friday, June 13, the Canadian agent, Hespler, who had first met Sudermann's party upon their arrival in New York, took charge of the delegation for the tour into Manitoba, Canada. They returned to Fargo July 6 and then made another excursion into Dakota.

At Fargo a land agent, Henry S. Back, met some of the Mennonite delegates and advised them that the Minnesota forests supplied nearly all the lumber used in the neighboring states, territories, and provinces and that it would be advantageous for the Mennonites to locate as near to the source of the lumber supply as possible. In a letter to Governor Austin, Back transmitted the desire of the Mennonites that the government should reserve for them for a year or two such areas of land as they might select for their settlement. Back suggested that the Congressmen from the Western states ought to use their influence in Congress to make such reservations possible.²⁵

Sudermann and the other delegates who remained with him were now ready to begin their investigation of Minnesota. The St. Paul and Pacific railroad line had not yet been completed to Fargo, so they had to travel by other means to the other end of the line at Breckenridge. On July 10 they boarded a mail coach drawn by four white horses. As they traveled southward on the Minnesota side of the Red River, Sudermann observed that the rolling prairie was covered with an excellent growth of grass and many flowers. The region was unoccupied with the exception of a few settlers who had established their homes in favorable spots on the river bank. At one of these lonely homesteads the coachman stopped and exchanged the four tired white horses for two pair of fresh bays. In the scattered patches of forest Sudermann noted the presence of oak, ash, hazel and plum trees, the latter heavily laden with fruit. At the military post, Fort Abercrombie, which is about thirty-six miles from Fargo, they crossed the Red River and continued their journey on the Dakota side to Breckenridge where they arrived after sundown. Sudermann found the Dakota prairie quite satisfactory in appearance and somewhere along the way admired a patch of luxurious potatoes belonging to a pioneer settler.

25. Henry S. Back, General Land Agent, Moorhead, Minn., to Governor Austin, July 8, 1873, in State of Minnesota Governor's Archives, Box 608, Immigration Papers, 1873.

At Breckenridge Seeger and a man named Trott²⁶ were on hand to meet and entertain the Mennonites whom they invited to come into an elegant railroad coach for a conference to make plans for the examination of an area of twelve townships of land near Douglas,²⁷ fifty miles away. Sudermann and two other delegates were given lodging in the coach for the night. Early on the next day, July 11, a special train conveyed the party southeastward to Douglas, from which point they made two excursions into the territory included in the twelve townships which Seeger and Trott had suggested to the Mennonites as a site for their settlement. The first tour took them eight miles east of Douglas into the unsettled region. Sudermann liked the variations in the landscape because of the many small lakes with their abundance of wild ducks and geese, but he was not as well pleased with the prairie land in which he noticed many rocks, the stand of grass was not as good as that which they had seen the day before, and the humus content of the soil seemed insufficient. Occasionally the grass was quite long in the low places and in some of the lakes they found reeds growing near the banks. In the fields of a settler the wheat and barley looked very good, and the rye was shoulder high, but the potato fields were not as good as the patch they had seen on the previous day near Abercrombie.

The second excursion from Douglas took the party northward where the country was more attractive because the growth of grass was better. They found fields of wheat with well-matured heads and some settlers' watermelon patches were in bloom. There were scattered settlers of many nationalities: Swedes, Norwegians, Estonians and Finns. Some of them claimed to have been in the region for 20 years. One of the Swedes won the respect and admiration of the Mennonites when he indicated the size of his farm by telling them that he could draw on it a furrow one and one-half miles long. For the night they returned to Douglas where they were quartered in the railroad coach. Sudermann complained that the night was so cool that woolen blankets hardly sufficed to keep them warm. Even in the daytime their coats were none too warm.

On the next day they decided to journey on to Minneapolis in the company of Seeger and Trott. The latter offered to reserve for them three hundred thousand acres of land near the railroad lines

26. According to Sudermann Trott was a "land commissioner of Minnesota" (p. 55). but he was probably misinformed, for H. F. Peterson in *Railroads and the Settlement of Minnesota from 1862-80* states that Herman Trott had charge of the State Fair exhibit of the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad in 1872 and 1873. Very likely he was an official in that company.

27. This station's name must have been changed since that time. The village now nearest the point on the line 50 miles from Breckenridge is Donnelly in Stevens County. Douglas Minnesota, is a hamlet near Rochester, Olmstead County, in Southeastern Minnesota.

(the St. Paul & Pacific) for four years, promising in addition to provide them with building lumber on very reasonable terms. Sudermann made no comment as to whether or not this proposition was given any serious consideration.

As the train conveyed the party eastward, Sudermann observed that the stand of grass was better than it had been in the region examined the day before. At two o'clock a short stop at Willmar gave them opportunity to eat dinner, at Trott's expense this time. From Willmar on, the country looked much more settled and civilized, for they passed many farms, grain fields, hayfields with the cut hay lying in windrows, and a ripe wheat field which the farmers had begun to harvest. Sometime during the course of the day's journey Seeger volunteered the information that they would find Nebraska and Minnesota very much alike, but that the latter had a better school system and a larger German population. At the close of the day the party arrived in Minneapolis where they took lodging in a hotel for the night.

During the first part of the next day, Saturday, sightseeing was the most important business. The first objects of curiosity were the falls in the Mississippi River and the factories that were operated by power developed therefrom. Later they saw most of the wonders of Minneapolis on a tour through the city in vehicles provided for the purpose. According to Sudermann the Mennonite deputies were favorably impressed with the young city and its industrious population of over ten thousand.

At two o'clock they boarded the train for St. Paul where Seeger was waiting at the station to receive them. After making arrangements with Bishop, Chief Engineer of the St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad, for a tour over that line on the following Monday Seeger took the group to the State Capitol for an audience with Governor Austin who encouraged them to continue their careful investigations. He cautioned the Mennonites not to underestimate the severity of the winter season in Minnesota.

On Sunday morning they found a German Methodist church closed, so they attended an English service in another church. After spending a portion of the afternoon at the home of Seeger they went to the railway station to bid farewell to J. B. Power, who had accompanied them thus far, and returned to their lodging place. Sudermann describes their quarters as "good and clean". Their host was a Bavarian named Gruber.

The St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad provided a special coach for the trip to southwestern Minnesota where the company wished to show them some of its unsettled land. Leaving St. Paul at 7 o'clock on Monday morning the train took them through Shakopee, St. Peter, Mankato and Mountain Lake²⁸ to Worthington in Nobles County near the Iowa line, where they arrived at noon. In the afternoon there was time to visit a few farms in the neighborhood of Worthington.

Tuesday morning a special locomotive took them in their coach back up the line for about thirty miles to Wilder, near the northern line of Jackson County. This hamlet of two houses was the midpoint of a territory of about nine townships within which the railroad company offered to reserve for the Mennonites for several years its share of the land at an average price of six dollars an acre, including one half of the platted village at twelve dollars an acre. On a wagon tour into the neighboring prairie country they found good black soil with an excellent stand of grass, but the grain looked poor in comparison, in spite of the abundant rainfall of the spring season. Grasshoppers had damaged the grain earlier in the summer. The landscape was pleasantly varied by the presence of a river and numerous lakes. For the night they returned to their lodging place in Worthington.

Wednesday morning their special train took them to Heron Lake, a village located six miles southwest of Wilder. In this vicinity the land appeared to be very much like that which they had seen the day before near Wilder. Shortly after noon the whole party returned to Worthington where the Mennonite deputies took leave of General Bishop, their generous host, and at three o'clock boarded the train to Sioux City, Iowa, from where they planned to go to Nebraska, Kansas and Texas before returning to their homeland. Thus ended the official Mennonite investigation of the advantages, opportunities and privileges that Minnesota could offer them for the establishment of a new home such as they desired.

While the deputies were gone on their mission to America the sentiment in favor of emigration was rapidly growing among their people, partly as a result of Czar Alexander's persistent refusal to make any concessions to them. Another important contributing factor was the generally favorable character of the frequent reports sent home by the deputies enroute. Although the Czar had given the

28. They did not stop at this village where the first Mennonite settlers in Minnesota located in the late fall of that year.

Mennonites permission to emigrate, he apparently did not wish them to go, for he expelled from the country a number of their leaders who had become rather active in stirring up emigration sentiment. One such man was Consul Cornelius Jansen of Berdiansk, who suddenly received notice to leave Russia very shortly. He did so on May 26, 1873, taking his family temporarily to Berlin, Ontario, from where he and his son, Peter, went on an extended tour through Minnesota, Iowa, Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas before finally locating in Nebraska.²⁹ Sudermann, on his way back to Russia, met Jansen in New York on the 20th of August.³⁰

Sometime in July or August thirty families in one of the newer Mennonite colonies located in the Crimean Peninsula decided not to await the return of the deputies and so they sold their farms, packed up their belongings and started the long journey to America. They arrived in New York at the very hour when the deputies were about to embark for their return journey to Russia.³¹ The time available for consultation was too short for the deputies to advise the immigrants about the most desirable place for settlement, so they had to make independent investigations. They found a temporary abode among the American Mennonites at Elkhart, Indiana, while their leaders toured the western states in search of a permanent home site.

Seeger, who watched very closely all the developments in the Mennonite immigration, learned of the arrival of the thirty five families and went to Elkhart with the hope that he might be able to induce them to settle in Minnesota. He found that practically all of them were planning to go to Kansas where two of them had been induced to buy land, but he was able to persuade some of their leaders to go with him on a tour of inspection through Minnesota. According to Seeger they explored the state "thoroughly and to their satisfaction". The time of this tour was about October 1, 1873. Seeger now felt quite confident that this group of Mennonites would settle in Minnesota, but he was disappointed, for shortly after the committee of investigation returned to Elkhart, some land agents induced most of them to locate in the neighborhood of Yankton in Dakota Territory. Seeger did not give up the contest, for he went to Yankton and convinced some of them that Minnesota could offer them a better home. Those who believed Seeger came to Minnesota with him and settled at Mountain Lake in Cottonwood County.

29. Peter Jansen, *Memoirs, The Record of a Busy Life*, 39.

30. Sudermann, *Eine Deputationsreise*, 78.

31. *Ibid.*, 79.

According to Seeger's report ³² this group consisted of twenty families, but that figure does not agree with local records which state that there were only thirteen families in all that settled at Mountain Lake in 1873. ³³ The time of the arrival of these original Mennonite settlers in the community was in the latter part of the month of October. The *Minnesota Staatszeitung* of October 28, 1872, reported that five Mennonites had bought for cash "one section of railroad land within three miles of Mountain Lake" and had in addition acquired a quarter section each of government land under the Pre-emption or the Timber Culture Acts.

The arrival and settlement of this small group of thirteen families was the last event in the story of how the first Mennonite settlers found their way to Minnesota and founded the settlement at Mountain Lake.

32. Seeger, *Report on Russo-German Immigration* (St. Paul, Dec. 20, 1873).

33. The Rempel Chronicle contains a most complete list of the names of the heads of Mennonite immigrant families with the year of their arrival and their place origin.

CHAPTER III

MOUNTAIN LAKE BECOMES A MENNONITE COMMUNITY

The coming of the Mennonites was an important event in the history of Mountain Lake,¹ because they came in sufficient numbers to control and dominate the subsequent development of the community. The area in which they settled was not, however, raw uninhabited frontier country, untouched by American civilization, to which they could bodily transplant the peculiar pattern of civilization which they had developed in their hermetic Russian colonies. The frontier process had already laid the foundation for and begun to build a typical American community. It would have been impossible for them to conform immediately and completely to the American way of living. To undo what had already been built and build anew according to their own pattern would have been almost as difficult. They chose the middle road of compromise, adaptation, and modification so that Mountain Lake became an American Mennonite community rather than a reproduction of a typical Russian Mennonite community. In order to fully understand and appreciate the conditions and circumstances under which the Mennonites settled in the community it is necessary to become acquainted with the origin and early development of the area.

The locality which in this study is usually designated as Mountain Lake or the Mountain Lake community includes an area of about four and one half townships in the southeastern part of Cottonwood County with an extension eastward into Watonwan County. Cottonwood County is the third county east of the South Dakota line in the second tier of counties above the Iowa border. The land surface, which gradually slopes downward from west to east, is broken by a number of creeks or small rivers and numerous depressions which form small lakes or marshy swamps in wet seasons, but make good farming land in dry seasons. There are only a few good permanent lakes within the area. The mean elevation of the area is about one thousand three hundred feet above sea level.

1. The term "Mountain Lake" is used throughout as representative of the entire Mennonite settlement, except when otherwise specified.

Before the white man set foot in this region it was an open treeless prairie inhabited chiefly by wild game commonly found in the middle-western prairie country. Apparently this area was never the permanent home of any particular tribe of Indians. Occasional discoveries of Indian relics, such as arrowheads, indicate that it was perhaps used mostly as a hunting ground by the Indians living in the surrounding regions.

The region became territory of the United States in 1803 as a part of the Louisiana Purchase. It was included in various successive territories until Minnesota Territory, which was created in 1849, became a state in 1858.

The first settler who is known to have located in Cottonwood County was a German named "Dutch Charlie" Zierke, who was found living in the northwestern part of the county by the Federal surveyors in 1859. Where he came from or how long he had been living in the county is not known, but it is supposed that he was a trapper and that he was killed by Indians during the Sioux War in 1862. After the survey was completed in 1859 a few other settlers came to the county, but little was known concerning them, except that they all fled from the county after the Sioux War broke out in 1862. After the uprising was put down settlers came to the county again. The first homesteader in the county was a man named Joseph F. Bean.²

The first man known to have lived within the area of the Menonite settlement was a trapper named William Mason. He came to Wisconsin from Utica, New York, in 1853 and a few years later moved to Winnebago, Faribault County, Minnesota. He made his living as a hunter and trapper of fur-bearing animals and found the region which now is southeastern Cottonwood County to be one of his best territories. Here he obtained otter, foxes, mink and wolves, and occasionally shot an elk or a deer. On one of his trips he came to a large shallow lake with three islands in it. He named the lake Mountain Lake and the largest of the islands Mountain Island. In 1865 he and his wife decided to move to this region and settled on Mountain Island where they lived in a log hut for three years, fifteen miles away from the nearest neighbor. During this time a daughter was born to them. She was the first white child known to have been born within the present area of Cottonwood County.³

2. John A. Brown, *History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:79-80.

3. *Mountain Lake View*, August 5, 1921.

Settlement progressed rather slowly in this region for some time because of the absence of adequate transportation facilities. Water transportation was wholly lacking and there were no wagon roads or trails except those made locally by the early settlers. The nearest railroad and market towns were New Ulm and Mankato, which were both fifty or more miles away. In 1868 a few settlers located in Lakeside Township and commenced farming operations. Enough pioneers straggled in during the following year to bring the estimated population to ten.⁴ One of the newcomers of 1869 was Alfred A. Soule, who was a prominent farmer and leader in the community until he moved away in the later seventies. He was a former Kentucky slaveholder who could not bear to remain in the "New South" among the emancipated negroes and sought a new home on the frontier where he would not be continually reminded of the "Old South" that was no more.⁵ He purchased a preemption right and an equity in an adjoining forty-acre tract of timber on the northern shore of Mountain Lake from William Mason. At first his chief interest was forestry, for he planted and cultivated a large number and variety of trees on his land and achieved the distinction of becoming vice-president of the State Forestry Association,⁶ but he also successfully developed the more common types of agricultural activities. In 1872 he possessed a fine herd of dairy cattle and his crops gave "evidence of careful cultivation and constant attention".⁷

In 1870 there was a very marked increase in the tempo of settlement in Cottonwood County. According to reported hearsay the county had only about ten inhabitants in 1869.⁸ The Federal census of 1870 recorded a population of 534. In another year this figure had more than doubled, the estimated population being about 1200.⁹ The state census of 1875 enumerated a population of 2870, the average density being over four inhabitants per square mile.¹⁰ The frontier line, which had come to within a few miles of the eastern border of the county by 1870,¹¹ had moved westward over the county by 1875 and was rapidly approaching the Dakota line.

4. The *Windom Reporter* of September 14, 1871, gave this estimate as based on hearsay.
5. This information concerning Soule's past was obtained directly from local pioneers who knew him personally.

6. Brown, *History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:80-1.

7. *Windom Reporter*, July 25, 1872.

8. See above, p. 44, note 4.

9. *Windom Reporter*, September 14, 1871.

10. The area of Cottonwood County was 650.39 square miles, or eighteen regular townships. It is the same today.

11. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 3:60 (a map of Minnesota in 1870).

12. Its name was changed about twenty five years later to its present designation, namely "The Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railway". It now belongs to the Chicago and Northwestern System.

The stimulus for this sudden increase in the rate of settlement was provided by the coming of the railroad to this region which was otherwise devoid of rapid, convenient, and economical transportation facilities essential for the development of agricultural resources. Before the railroad came the settlers of the county had to travel fifty or more miles by oxcart to the nearest railroad or river towns, New Ulm and Mankato, to market their produce and purchase their supplies. In 1870 it became definitely known that a railroad would be built through the county very soon, and immediately the mere trickle of incoming settlers became a steady stream which increased in volume until about 1880 by which time most of the better farming land was occupied.

The railroad line which thus vitally affected the early economic development of Cottonwood County was originally known as the Minnesota Valley Railroad which began to build from St. Paul south-westward up the Minnesota Valley during the Civil War. This company was one of the four beneficiaries in Minnesota of the Federal Land Grant Act of 1857. In common with the other pioneer railroads in Minnesota this company was affected by financial difficulties, reorganizations, and other circumstances which frequently delayed or interrupted construction. In the later sixties the line was completed as far as Mankato and plans were made to extend it to Sioux City, Iowa. The company, now known as the St. Paul and Sioux City Railway,¹² completed the construction of the line from Mankato to St. James in Watonwan County in 1870 and also finished the preliminary survey through the south-eastern part of Cottonwood County in the same year. Early in the spring of 1871 construction was resumed at St. James and proceeded rapidly through the remainder of Watonwan County¹³ and on through Cottonwood County, the twenty-eight miles of road from St. James to the southern line of the latter county being completed by July.

The south-eastern part of the county, especially the townships of Midway, Mountain Lake, Lakeside, and Great Bend through which the railroad was built, was now adequately provided with convenient marketing facilities. Anticipating the needs and requirements of the frontier lands which would soon be occupied and cultivated by industrious pioneer farmers the railroad company platted villages and erected stations at three points along the fifteen-mile¹⁴ length of railroad within Cottonwood County. The

13. The distance from St. James to the Cottonwood County line is about twelve miles.

14. This figure was derived from map measurements and may therefore not be exactly accurate.

rapid influx of settlers immediately justified the company's foresight, for all but one of the villages quickly became realities with the establishment of grain elevators, post offices, hotels, stores, and dwellings.

The largest and most important one of the three pioneer villages was Windom, which was thus named in honor of William Windom, United States Senator from Minnesota.¹⁵ Windom was located on the east bank of the Des Moines River on Section 25 of Great Bend Township, about a mile north of the southern county line. Less than three months after the railroad arrived the bustling little hamlet boasted of a weekly newspaper, a printing press, a hotel, a lumber yard, grain shipping facilities, a number of stores, and a corresponding number of private dwellings. During the first year of its existence hardy pioneer farmers came to Windom by ox-team from as far as the Dakota prairies to market their products and purchase the necessities of pioneer life. Windom became the permanent seat of government in 1872 when the county offices were moved from Great Bend, a little hamlet located some miles northwest of Windom that lost all reason for existence when the railroad failed to come its way. Windom was separated from Great Bend Township and incorporated as a village in 1875.¹⁶

The least important of the three villages was Bingham Lake which never prospered greatly because of the proximity on opposite sides of Windom and Mountain Lake, both of which were more favorably situated to attract the trade of the surrounding territory. The village acquired its name from the nearby lake which had been named by the Federal surveyor in 1859 in honor of his friend, United States Senator Bingham from Michigan.¹⁷ The development of the village was very slow. A railroad station was erected in 1872 after the railroad was built. In the same year a post office was established. The village was not platted until 1875, and it took twenty-five more years to become an incorporated village.

For the purposes of this study Mountain Lake is the most important one of these three early villages in the county. The original plans of the railroad surveyors provided for the establishment of a station at a point several miles east of the present site of

15. W. H. Stennett, Compiler, *A History of the Origin of the Place Names Connected with the Chicago and North Western and the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroads*, including States, Counties, Towns, Villages and Stations. 197.

16. Brown, *A History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:287-291.

17. Stennett, *A History of the Origin of the Place Names*, 168.

Mountain Lake. This early location, which was close to the northern shore of the Mountain Lake discovered and so named by William Mason, was to be called "Midway" because it marked the exact mid-point between St. Paul, Minnesota, and Sioux City, Iowa. Before the railroad was completed through the community the company decided to locate the station at the present site on Section 33 of Midway Township. About that time the name was changed to Mountain Lake. Old pioneers say that the rough log structure which had been erected at Midway to serve as a station building was moved to the nearby A. A. Soule farm where it served for many years as a chicken barn. Mountain Lake village was platted by the railroad company in 1870, but a few houses had been built at the place in 1868.¹⁸ The coming of the railroad in 1871, however, marked the actual beginning of the village as an essential part of the agricultural community's development. At this point it is necessary to digress briefly in order to indicate the main trends in the county's history and development.

Cottonwood County was originally created by an act of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Minnesota on May 29, 1857. The original boundaries defined in the act included an area of twenty townships arranged in the form of a rectangle with a longitude of five townships and a latitude of four townships. The county lost seventy two square miles of its area in 1864 when the State Legislature transferred the two eastern townships in the northern-most tier of townships to Brown County. The two townships thus lost are designated in county history as the "stolen" townships because of some irregularities involved in the transfer.¹⁹

The government of the county was officially organized in 1870. The board of county commissioners held its first meeting on July 29 of that year at Great Bend, the site of a store and post office about four miles north-west of the present site of Windom. The first and principal matter of business was the appointment of county officers, who located their offices at Great Bend until Windom was adopted as the permanent seat of the county government.²⁰

Very shortly after the organization of the county government some of the townships set up their several civil governments. Lake-side, Great Bend, and Springfield, respectively the second, third,

18. This fact was found recorded in the unpublished local chronicle of John P. Remple (1857-1933), one of the Mennonite pioneers in the community. Fuller information about this important source and its author is to be found in the bibliography.

19. Brown, *A History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:90-92.

20. *Ibid.*, 1:95.

and fourth townships from east to west in the southern-most row of townships, held their first meetings for the election of officers on August 27, 1870. By 1874 over two-thirds of the county's townships were organized and by 1880 none lacked a town government. Mountain Lake, Midway, and Carson townships, which became the home of the majority of the Mennonites, were all organized in 1871. Midway, however, was at this time combined with Mountain Lake township and did not effect separate organization until 1895.²¹

The general history of Cottonwood County is a story of gradual and steady development uninterrupted by any very extraordinary or spectacular occurrences of a purely local nature. The government officials of the county, the townships, and the villages have as a whole been sincere, honest, reasonably efficient, and conservative in the administration of their duties. The population, which has always been wholly agricultural, was from the beginning predominantly Republican. In 1892, the Populists gained a few more votes for their Presidential candidate, James B. Weaver, than Benjamin Harrison received, and in 1912 Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive banner won a strong majority of the total number of votes cast.²² Since 1932 the Farmer-Laborites and the Democrats have grown considerably at the expense of the Republicans.

The material progress and prosperity of the county have throughout its history been wholly dependent on an agricultural economy that has become increasingly diversified and complex with the passing of time. In the early days one-crop farming was the usual practice, with wheat as the main crop in the seventies and flax the leading product in the eighties. Before the nineties had passed the farmers realized that they must do something to offset or eliminate the evils resulting from this type of farming and began to diversify by raising a great variety of crops and by developing various types of livestock-raising as important phases of their industry. The great progress that has been made in diversification, the introduction of power machinery, and the gradual trend toward more scientific farming have made agriculture an increasingly complex business that requires hard work and careful planning throughout the year.²³

21. *Ibid.*, passim.

22. *Ibid.*, I:110.

23. The most important wholly non-agricultural enterprise that developed in the county was a brick and tile factory located at Bingham Lake. It met with varying and often uncertain success during most of its period of existence. It was quite successful in the wet seasons during the World War when there was great demand for drainage tile. In 1916 the plant was running at full capacity of six to eight thousand tile a day, employing eleven men. The factory has not been in operation for some ten or more years and is being dismantled or permitted to go to ruin.

The development and improvement of transportation facilities were important factors in the economic progress of the county. The early wagon roads were gradually eliminated by the fencing of the cultivated farm lands and the grading of the section-line roads. With the advent of the motor car and truck came the building of improved roads, frequently with aid from state and Federal funds. The original railroad line²⁴ was supplemented with additional railroad lines in or near the county. In 1899 the Chicago & Northwestern R. R. built a line from Iowa into Minnesota which passed through the north-eastern corner of Cottonwood County. In 1900 the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha R. R. built what is known as the "Currie Branch" from the village of Bingham Lake north-west into Amboy township and then due west to Currie in Murray County. Four villages developed along this line within the county. The first one up the line from Bingham Lake is Delft in Carson township, then in successive order come Jeffers in Amboy township, Storden in Storden township, and Westbrook in Westbrook township.²⁵

Mountain Lake village became the center of the eastern part of the county after the railroad established a station on its site in 1871. As the community filled with settlers who broke the prairie sod and at the end of the first season began to bring their products to the station, the village gradually developed the establishments and enterprises that were needed to supply the wants of the pioneer farmers. One of the first business men was Paul Seeger²⁶ who lived on a farm just south of the station.²⁷ He built the first store in the village, probably in the fall of 1871 or early in 1872. His general merchandise business was a successful venture, making him a leading citizen in the pioneer community. In the spring of 1872 the next business man, John Yale, appeared on the scene as the "proprietor of an eating house".²⁸ On June 20 of the same year the new firm of Spaulding and Kenny celebrated with a dance attended by thirty couples the opening of their general store in a new two-story building erected by Hallet and Lynch, local contractors and lumber merchants.²⁹ In another month McPheters and Limber had built a shop and were prepared "to do all kinds of carpenter work, and keep a supply of furniture".³⁰ John Yale's

24. See above, p. 46.

25. Brown, *A History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, I: passim.

26. He was the son of William Seeger who brought the first Mennonite settlers to Mountain Lake in 1873. See above, Ch. II.

27. Records of the County Assessor, 1872.

28. *Windom Reporter*, March 21, 1872.

29. *Windom Reporter*, June 20, 1872.

30. *Windom Reporter*, July 25, 1872.

"eating house" apparently did not prosper, for in the late spring of 1873 the building was taken over by D. E. Yale and S. H. Soule³¹ who opened a hardware store.³² Most of these business men made frequent visits to Windom and advertised their wares in the *Windom Reporter*, the only newspaper in the county at that time.

The successive establishment of these business enterprises at Mountain Lake was made possible and necessary by the increasing number of settlers who located on the fertile prairie land, setting up claim shanties and beginning farming operations. The business men realized their dependence on the development of the community's agricultural resources and sought to lure settlers to Mountain Lake. Paul Seeger seems to have been the most active campaigner for settlers. The *Windom Reporter* describes him as

"one of the most energetic men in this county . . . We are told that he is doing excellent work in settling the country around the Lake. He boards each train and ere it leaves the station he has often induced people to stop and explore, and we are glad to know that but few turn away without locating."³³

Paul Seeger most likely influenced William Seeger, his father, to bring the first Mennonite settlers to Mountain Lake. It is probable that Paul Seeger met the official Mennonite deputies in August, 1873, when they passed through Mountain Lake on their way to the frontier regions in southwestern Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas.³⁴

The majority of settlers who came to the community in the early seventies were predominantly of American origin. A considerable portion of them were Civil War veterans who located on government land because of the special privileges granted them in recognition of their services to the Union during the war. Many of the veterans were bachelors interested in the possibilities of speculation and consequently did not cultivate very much of their land or make any extensive improvements. The most desirable type of settler was, of course, the man who brought his family with him, and began to cultivate his land and make improvements with the intention of staying in the community permanently. He

31. S. H. Soule was the son of of A. A. Soule, one of the earliest settlers in the community. See above, p. 44.

32. *Windom Reporter*, May 29, 1873.

33. *Windom Reporter*, May 9, 1872.

34. See above, Ch. II.

usually bought railroad land,³⁵ or took up a government claim.³⁶ Among the newcomers were also the usual frontier speculators and the transient settlers who may be fitly called "chronic frontiersmen" or "perpetual pioneers" because they always moved westward with the frontier.

It was comparatively easy for the pioneer farmers to commence farming operations on the flat, open, treeless prairie with its rich, black, heavy loam that averaged about two feet in depth and was underlaid successively with yellow and blue clay. Wheat was the principal crop in the pioneer days. Next in importance was hay made from the wild prairie grass that grew everywhere luxuriously until the plow came and transformed the land into cultivated fields. Oxen were the main and only motive power for the heavy farm work and the transportation of farm produce to the nearest market. Among the pioneers were a few ambitious and aggressive individuals who distinguished themselves by specializing in types of agriculture other than the common production of small grain. A. A. Soule was successful in raising a fine herd of Durham cattle³⁷ and in the cultivation of many varieties of trees.³⁸ John Yale,³⁹ who came from New York as an experienced dairyman, developed such a good dairy herd that the editor of the *Windom Reporter* discussed the possibility that many farmers might turn from wheat raising to dairying.⁴⁰ Cattle were sufficiently numerous in the community in 1872 for Paul Seeger to accept a government contract for the purchase of four- to eight-year-old stock for the army.⁴¹

The community was apparently typically American in regard to political activities. A. A. Soule and Paul Seeger were very active participants in the political affairs of the community, the county, and the state. In 1871 both men attended the county Republican conventions and served on the credentials committee. Seeger was elected delegate to the state convention.⁴² About this time Soule became involved in a politico-personal controversy with Charles Chamberlin, the first county auditor, which considerably reduced

35. The railroad land-grant of alternate sections on both sides of the line extended beyond the limits of the area later occupied by the Mennonites.

36. Many settlers acquired both government and railroad lands. A few claims were taken up under the Timber Culture Act after its passage in March, 1873.

37. *Windom Reporter*, July 25, 1873.

38. See above, p. 44.

39. He was in all probability the same John Yale previously referred to as the proprietor of an "eating house" (p. 51).

40. *Windom Reporter*, May 29, 1873.

41. *Windom Reporter*, August 1, 1873.

42. *Windom Reporter*, September 7 and October 5, 1871.

his influence in the Republican Party. Two years later he was nominated for county coroner by the "County Mass", a group of "Liberals, Democrats, and disappointed aspirants".⁴³

The Patrons of Husbandry organized a grange in Lakeside township in 1872 and in Mountain Lake in the following spring, both under the leadership of J. W. Benjamin of the former township.⁴⁴ The prevailing spirit of discontent and unrest among the agrarian population of the United States touched the as yet sparsely settled frontier community but mildly.

The young men of the community found some time to give to organized recreation. In 1872 the Lone Star Baseball Club came into being with John Yale as president and S. H. Soule as vice-president.⁴⁵ They exchanged games with similar clubs at Windom and at Jackson in Jackson County.

Education became a concern of the pioneers as early as the organization of the local units of civil government. The settlers in Mountain Lake, Midway, and Lakeside townships began to organize local school districts only about six months after the first school district in the county was established at Great Bend on November 25, 1870.⁴⁶ The first school house in the eastern part of the county was built at the village of Mountain Lake in 1871. The building was a very drafty one-room shanty, fourteen by twenty feet in size, built of rough weather-board lumber, and equipped with a rough teacher's desk and crude benches set against the wall around the room. Although it was the only school in the eastern part of the county the total enrollment was less than twenty pupils during the first year. In the next year thirty six pupils attended the school.⁴⁷ By the spring of 1873 the people in the district were planning to erect a new two-story building with dimensions of eighteen by thirty feet, the second-floor room to be adapted for use as a public hall,⁴⁸ but the building was apparently not built until some years later.

Little is known of the religious activities of the Mountain Lake community in the early seventies except the fact that there was some contemplation of the building of a church in the early spring of 1873.⁴⁹

43. *Windom Reporter*, October 24, 1871.

44. *Windom Reporter*, December 5, 1872; April 17, 1873.

45. *Windom Reporter*, June 27, 1872.

46. Brown, *A History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:245, 258.

47. *Ibid.*, 1: 258-9.

48. *Windom Reporter*, March 27, 1873.

49. *Windom Reporter*, March 27, 1873.

Among the many hardships and difficulties endured by the early pioneers were several that stood out as especially severe and trying, namely, the long cold winters with their raging blizzards, and the grasshopper plague. The winters of 1871-2 and 1872-3 were unusually rigorous. In the fall of 1871 the first heavy snow-fall came in November, delaying the trains for some time. In the early part of December no trains were operated for over ten days,⁵⁰ and after the beginning of the new year the railroad was closed from January until the tenth of April.⁵¹ During this winter two sons of Lader, a farmer near Mountain Lake, froze to death in one of the blizzards.⁵² In the fall of 1872 winter set in with such severity before the middle of November that no passenger trains were operated for about a month.⁵³ The famous "Blizzard of 1873", which caused much suffering and some loss of life in Minnesota and neighboring states, came in January and raged for three days, but did not take any lives in the community.⁵⁴

Undoubtedly many of the pioneers were sorely tried by these successive hard winters, causing them to question the wisdom of the selection of Minnesota as their new home, or in the worst of the season to consider possibilities of moving to a region with a milder climate, but the return of the warmer seasons usually dispelled these thoughts from their minds, causing them rather to look forward with renewed courage and optimism to the time when a rich harvest should reward them for their labors and privations. In 1872 the crops were very good in the region and the farmers were very hopeful about the future. The first part of the next farming season gave promise of good returns until the grasshopper plague suddenly arrived in June⁵⁵ and not only swiftly devoured practically all vegetation, but also damaged other materials that are usually not considered edible. The devourers repeated their ravages for five successive seasons with results that will be discussed more fully later. It is sufficient to state here that many

50. *Windom Reporter*, December 14, 1871.

51. Brown, *A History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:81.

52. *Windom Reporter*, February 22, 1872.

53. *Windom Reporter*, December 12, 1872.

54. Brown, *A History of Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties*, 1:54, 305-10.

55. *Windom Reporter*, June 26, 1873. Shortly after this date this weekly newspaper, the only one in the country at this time, was discontinued. It has proven to be a valuable source of information for the period in which it was published (September 7, 1871 to June or July, 1873). There was no newspaper in the county until the Cottonwood County Citizen was founded in 1882, and consequently the present store of information about that period of nine years lacks the type of continuity that is made possible by such a source record.

were reduced to poverty and want, so that state aid became an urgent necessity. Paul Seeger was for a number of years the local distributor of state relief goods at Mountain Lake.⁵⁶

From the foregoing account it is apparent that Mountain Lake and vicinity was, in its origin and early development, similar to hundreds of other American frontier communities. With a few appropriate alterations and adaptations this tale might be made to tell with equal fitness the story of pioneer days in many other localities. Up to about September, 1873, no one would have undertaken to predict with any degree of certainty that the community would not always continue to be just like other American communities, especially its nearest neighbors, in all its essential aspects, but that it would undergo a change in one or more of its essential features so as to make it unlike all other American communities. Such a prophecy was, of course, never made, but that which would have been its fulfilment occurred in the years between 1873 and 1880, for Mountain Lake came to be a distinctly different community in one very important aspect: its inhabitants. Instead of continuing to be populated with the usual mixture of native-born Americans, naturalized Americans, and foreign immigrants of many different nationalities, it came to be inhabited almost completely by Mennonites whose cultural pattern was quite unlike that of the typical American.

The story of how the first Mennonite settlers came to Mountain Lake has already been told in the previous chapter. This first group of Mennonites, who came in the fall of 1873, became the nucleus around which the Mennonite settlement developed, for they were the magnet which kept a stream of their people coming to the community for about seven years, or until 1880 when Mennonite emigration from Russia ceased. A total of about 295 Mennonite families, approximately 1800 individuals, made the long trek from Russia to the Mountain Lake community in these years. It will be of interest to note some of the details and incidents connected with their immigration and settlement that have not been lost with the passing of time.

The original group of Mennonite immigrants, who came to Mountain Lake from their former home in the Crimean Peninsula in 1873, did not find it at all difficult to obtain land, for unoccupied railroad land was still easy to find and could be purchased for about

56. Paul Seeger, Mountain Lake, Minnesota, to Governor Horace Austin, April 19, 1873 in the State of Minnesota Governor's Archives, File 640, Miscellaneous Correspondence, March, 1873 to June, 1873. In this letter Seeger reported the receipt of a shipment of state relief goods.

four to six dollars an acre.⁵⁷ William Seeger, who brought them to the community and resided there for some years,⁵⁸ was in the employ of the railroad company,⁵⁹ which granted to all the Mennonite immigrants who bought of its land free passage over its line. Before winter came all of the thirteen families, numbering probably about seventy-five individuals, had located on farms in the vicinity of the village. A few of them bought farms complete with all equipment, such as there was, from Americans who wanted to move on. Many of the latter seemed to be very anxious to sell all they had, except their personal belongings, at reasonable prices, especially so after the grasshoppers had devoured their crops for several seasons. One of the Mennonite pioneers of 1873, Aaron Peters,⁶⁰ remarked that some of the Americans, especially the bachelor Civil War veterans, became scared when the Mennonites came in larger numbers and were anxious to get out of the community. Apparently they did not want to live with these strange foreigners.

From the very beginning of their settled abode in their new home the Mennonites became ardent boosters for their community by seeking to influence their relatives and friends to come and live with them in Minnesota. There were a number of good reasons why they so quickly manifested this typical frontier attitude. Having come to the community with the intention of making it their permanent home, they naturally craved the presence of more of their own people to drive away the isolation and loneliness of the new and strange frontier by populating the open spaces about them and sharing with them the advantages as well as the hardships of their new life. Some thousands of their fellow-believers were definitely committed to the idea of coming to America, but few of them were sure of their ultimate destination in America, so it was perfectly natural for the Mountain Lake Mennonites to seek to influence them in favor of settlement in Minnesota rather than settlement in Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, or Manitoba where the governments or railroads were offering more attractive inducements.

The influence exercised in this manner was largely of a personal character based on prior ties of kinship, friendship and association, and was brought to bear upon the prospective immigrants by means of personal letters which in all probability conformed closely to

57. *Zur Heimath*, May, 1875.

58. *Ibid.* Seeger stated in a public letter to the Mennonites in Russia and Prussia that he had moved to the community.

The county assessors records show that he owned a quarter section of land two miles southwest of the village.

59. *Ibid.* Seeger was named as agent in an advertisement of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad.

60. Peters was then eight years old and is still living today.

the usual frontier type in their expression of enthusiasm, optimism, and courage, their emphasis on or even the exaggeration of the local advantages with some deprecation or minimizing of inducements and attractions offered elsewhere, and their minimizing of or complete silence about the darker side of frontier life. In the winter of 1875 the Mennonite settlers at Mountain Lake wrote a circular letter of about 1200 words, addressed "To Our Friends and Fellow-believers in Prussia and Russia", which exemplified the above-mentioned characteristics. It was signed by sixteen of the leading men and published in the Mennonite immigrant paper, *Zur Heimath* 61.

Occasionally some of the men who had the means would go out to meet groups of Mennonite immigrants at strategic points along their route of travel from the eastern seaports to the frontier areas where they intended to settle. Upon leaving Russia the Mennonites usually traveled overland through Germany to Hamburg or some Belgian port where they embarked. Those who were definitely planning to go to Manitoba had to cross to England where they took passage in British vessels going to Quebec. From there they traveled over the Great Lakes to Duluth, thence to Fargo by rail, and then north down the Red River by steamboat. The majority, however, crossed the Atlantic on North-German Lloyd, or Red Star liners and landed at New York. Now and then a group landed at Philadelphia. At these ports they were usually met by numerous agents of railroads, land companies, or other commercial concerns who were interested in them as prospective settlers or customers. They were also met by friends or relatives who had preceded them, had located in one of the frontier states or territories, and now wanted them to go with them. Frequently the immigrants decided at these ports where they wanted to make their homes and the groups then broke up into smaller parties who proceeded to their chosen destination.

One such party left New York in the summer of 1875 with the intention of going to Manitoba. In Chicago they were met by David Schroeder, one of the Mountain Lake pioneers of 1873, who accompanied them to St. Paul, Minnesota, where they had to change trains. Schroeder took them out to lunch before they boarded the train which, they thought, would take them on toward Manitoba. After the train had left St. Paul Schroeder appeared and told them that they were on the way to Mountain Lake. There was much chagrin and dissatisfaction among the immigrants, but they went on to Mountain Lake, got off the train, and stayed. 62

61. May, 1875.

62. This information was obtained directly from Peter Wiens who was a member of that group.

In the summer of 1877 the Jacob Balzer family landed at Philadelphia together with other Mennonite immigrants. They had received a very urgent invitation from their old friends, the Henry Goertz family, who had settled at Mountain Lake, to come to their state, but they decided to go to Newton, Kansas, and made preparations to depart from Philadelphia. Their son, Jacob, however who was seventeen years old at the time, was not satisfied and did not rest until his parents changed their plans and came to Mountain Lake. ⁶³

Several groups of Mennonites came to Mountain Lake after they had first settled elsewhere and found the location unsatisfactory. Twenty eight families ⁶⁴ came in 1875 after spending one winter in Manitoba, where, they complained, the climate was too cold, the temperature being from forty to forty-five degrees below zero, so that the cattle suffered from frostbitten ears and legs. Erdmann Penner, whom they sent out from Manitoba to examine Minnesota and Nebraska, reported in favor of Minnesota. ⁶⁵ Nearly all of this group located on farms in or near Butterfield township in Watonwan County, thus forming the eastern part of the Mennonite community. Their locality has ever since that time borne the name of "Bergthal" because they came from the Mennonite colony of that name in Russia.

Early in the spring of the same year Henry Schultz visited the community and found it more to his liking than Yankton in Dakota Territory where he and his children and grandchildren had spent the winter, and decided to move to Minnesota. ⁶⁶ They traveled ten days by covered wagon from Yankton to Sheldon, Iowa, the nearest railroad town, and boarded the train which took them to Mountain Lake where they located about a mile southwest of the village. ⁶⁷ The two or three horses which they brought with them from Dakota were the first to be owned by Mennonites in the community. ⁶⁸

Local records have preserved sufficient data to make possible the compilation of fairly accurate figures showing the number of Mennonite immigrants coming to the community in each year from 1873 on. They are as follows for the years indicated: ⁶⁹

63. Jacob J. Balzer related this incident in a personal interview with the writer.

64. Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika*, 41.

65. *Zur Heimath*, 32-33.

66. *Ibid.*

67. This material was obtained from the records of the Schultz family.

68. This is a fact of common knowledge among the local pioneers.

69. The Rempel Chronicle contains a long list of the names of heads of immigrant families with the dates of their coming and the name of their former home village in Russia.

| Year | Number of families | Approximate Number of Individuals |
|-------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1873 | 13 | 80 |
| 1874 | 19 | 125 |
| 1875 | 97 | 590 |
| 1876 | 84 | 480 |
| 1877 | 33 | 210 |
| 1878 | 37 | 245 |
| 1879 | 11 | 65 |
| 1880 | 1 | 5 |
| Total | 295 | 1800 |

With few exceptions the Mennonite immigrants were farmers, so their first concern upon arrival was the matter of acquiring land on which to commence farming operations. When they came in large groups at one time it was impossible for all of them to find satisfactory land immediately and often the families had to find temporary shelter while the men sought for land. The railroad company met this situation by erecting near the station a large wooden structure which was known as the "Immigrant House". Newly arrived immigrants were allowed to use this building free of charge until they could find a permanent abode in the community.⁷⁰

As the Mennonites came into the community, many of the American settlers left the locality, thus making room for the new arrivals and permitting more compact settlement than would have been possible otherwise. Fear or suspicion of the foreigners may have had some connection with this change, but it is more adequately accounted for by two other factors, namely the influence of the grasshopper plague, and the fact that a considerable number of the Mennonites were able to pay for their land with gold coin. The grasshopper plague, which one would naturally think of as a deterrent to immigration into an infested region, seemed to have the opposite effect in regard to the Mennonites. They seemed to have been less afraid of the scourge than were the Americans, and so they continued to come in spite of the presence of locusts in the area. More important, however, was the fact that the successive visitations of the plague had tried the courage and endurance of the Americans to the extent that they were very anxious to move away, but they were too poor to go without selling their farms, and so they offered to sell at very reasonable prices. The prospect of being paid in that precious frontier rarity, gold coin, no doubt greatly facilitated the

70. *Zur Heimath*, May, 1875.

conclusion of sales that were advantageous to the purchasers. One Mennonite farmer bought a 160 acre farm with standing crops, two or three buildings, six head of livestock, and some machinery for \$1250 cash, which was less than eight dollars an acre.⁷¹

The Mennonite immigrants were on the whole much better off than the average foreign immigrant who came to America, but that does not mean that none of them were very poor. Most of them were reasonably well fixed financially before they left Russia, but some were so poor even then that they had to be aided by their people in Russia, by their fellow-immigrants, or by the Mennonite Board of Guardians which the American Mennonites established for that purpose in 1874.⁷² All of those who had means suffered losses because the forced sale of their property made it impossible for them to realize its full value in terms of cash received. In this matter as well in the exchange of currency the earlier immigrants were fortunate, for they were usually able to sell their possessions easily at a comparatively small loss, and the exchange rates on the money market were very favorable, the Russian ruble being worth about seventy-five cents in 1875. By 1878 it had become difficult to sell property for more than a small fraction of its actual value, for as more and more people emigrated there were fewer and fewer people left to buy the emigrants' property. The value of the ruble declined rapidly after 1875 until it was worth only forty-five cents or less by 1878. There was a wide range in financial status among the immigrants from those who came with three thousand dollars in gold in their pockets to those who came with little or nothing, the latter being more numerous. Whether they were rich or poor, none seemed to have lacked opportunity to acquire land.

Among the Mennonite immigrants were a small number of individuals who, unlike the great majority of their people, took an interest in vocations other than agriculture. Business pursuits and trades such as served the needs of the growing community provided the best opportunity in non-agricultural activities and some half dozen Mennonites began the trend which led to Mennonite domination of the business interests of the village by establishing or taking over various business enterprises. The business men established residences in the village and soon formed a dominant element in its population.

71. This party was Jacob Wiens, the father of Peter Wiens who related the fact in a personal interview.

72. *Zur Heimath*, May, 1875.

Religion was so much more important to the Mennonites individually and collectively than it was to the average American frontiersman, especially those who had settled in the community, that the former dominated the character and the extent of religious life in the community. The non-Mennonite minority was too small to have any significant influence on religious affairs, or upon the social life of the people, which was largely controlled and conditioned by the former.

Education was closely linked to the Mennonites' religion and so they sought from the time of their arrival to control it as fully as possible, in order to perpetuate their faith and the German language, the latter being regarded as essential to the former by many of them.

The Mennonites were practically forced by sheer weight of their own numbers to assume control of the affairs of local politics and government, and they readily recognized that their own needs in these matters could be best met by themselves, but they did not take to politics for its own sake as American pioneers frequently did, and usually manifested only mild interest in political affairs that were not directly concerned with local interests. Politically Mountain Lake became a very conservative community with the coming of the Mennonites.

Thus is ended the tale of the origin and early development of an ordinary American frontier community and its rapid and unexpected transformation into a distinctly different community by the coming of the Mennonites who have ever since then largely determined its history.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN LAKE AS A MENNONITE COMMUNITY.

Economic Development

The Mennonites who came to Mountain Lake were practically one hundred percent agricultural in their background, training, and interests. For many generations their ancestors had been very successful farmers, so that it had become traditional for succeeding generations to follow in the foot-steps of their fathers. It was then natural for the Mennonites to depend in their new home upon the same means of material subsistence that had served them so well in the past.

The physical environment which they found in their new home did not differ greatly from that which obtained in their former home in Russia. The difference in latitude was only about two degrees, their old home being that much farther north, but the difference in altitude was much greater, for Mountain Lake at 1300 feet above sea level was situated more than 700 feet higher than their former home. The proximity of their old home to the Black Sea no doubt accounted for the fact that its climate was somewhat milder, the winters especially being less severe. The soil, a heavy black loam, was very nearly the same in both places, producing very much the same kinds and varieties of farm crops, trees, garden produce, and other vegetation. Some of the pioneers assert that the Russian soil was richer and more productive, and required less cultivation.

Despite the fact that the two environments were so nearly alike in their physical aspects, the Mennonites discovered that they could not regard their long journey merely as an unwelcome interruption permitting them to resume life here where they had left off upon leaving Russia. In order to well understand the adjustments and modifications which they had to make in their economic life it is necessary to examine their way of life in Russia.

When the first Mennonites settled in southern Russia near the close of the eighteenth century, the country near the northern shores of the Black Sea where they settled was inhabited chiefly by roaming bands of wild Tartars to whom a settled agricultural life was unknown. In order to attract substantial agriculturists to the region Catherine II and her successor, Paul I, offered the Mennonites very liberal inducements. Among the special favors expressly guaranteed to the Mennonites in written form were the perpetual lease of sixty-five desiatin of land to each family in return for the payment of a nominal annual tax, and complete vocational freedom which included full control of commerce, trade and industry within their colonies. They were thus given almost complete power to control, regulate and develop as they saw fit the economic phases of their life. Farming proved to be the most successful and attractive occupation, and there were few among them who took up other occupations.

The Mennonite system for the organization of local farming communities closely resembled that of the typical Russian village community. Each village consisted of from fifteen to as many as one hundred families, each of which was allotted enough land in the village for buildings, a small pasture and a good-sized garden. The cattle of all the inhabitants were kept on a common pasture outside of the village and cared for by a village herdsman who brought the milk-cows in every evening and took them out again in the morning. The regular farming land around the village was allotted to the individual farmers in such a manner that each one received an equal share of the best and the poorest land. The average-size farm was known as a "Wirtschaft" and consisted of sixty-five desiatin, or about 175 acres. The individual farmer could not sell the land which he farmed; he could only sell the right to its possession and use, because the actual title remained vested in the Imperial Crown.

Wheat production was the principal source of cash income, for the nearness of the Black Sea ports gave them ready access to foreign markets, and so it was their leading crop, but they raised quite a few other crops to supply their own needs, such as feed for their livestock, and practically all of their own food supplies. Each family did a great deal of home manufacturing, providing for itself nearly all of the articles that were needed for life in those times. Farming proved to be so much more remunerative than any of the trades and professions that the latter were usually plied by

farmers as secondary vocations. Most of the villages had their farmer-preachers, farmer-teachers, farmer-blacksmiths, and other combinations who served local needs.

In addition to becoming highly self-sufficient the Mennonites attained a level of economic well-being that was much higher than that of the native Russian population. As farmers they were so successful that they became the model farmers of the realm. Their agricultural methods were largely of German origin, but they were progressive on their own initiative. In 1830 they organized an agricultural society which successfully experimented with the rotation of crops, the scientific breeding of livestock, forestry, the conservation of water resources, the silk industry, and other agricultural improvements besides concerning itself with non-agricultural activities such as education and the care of dependents.¹ At the time of the emigration in the seventies an improved farm of about 175 acres was worth up to \$9,000 in American money. It is probable that few Mennonites would have left Russia at that time, had not their religious liberties been threatened. Even as it was the majority chose to suffer the limitations imposed by the new Imperial policy rather than give up their comfortable economic existence for the uncertainties connected with the costly trek to a new and unknown home.

When the Mennonites reached their new home in Minnesota, they could not live the way they did in Russia. Nor were they granted the opportunity to build their economic life from the bottom up as their fore-fathers had done in Russia. They came to a community that was already in the making after a pattern other than their own, and it was too far built for them to break down and build anew. The land was already surveyed, pioneers were living on and had begun the development of compact individual farms, local villages were already in existence, and many of the local institutions had begun to develop—all of these things had sprung up before their coming according to a scheme that did not fit their way of doing things.

As the Mennonites moved into the community in little groups at a time, not knowing whether any more of their people would follow them, they conformed, in so far as necessity compelled them, to the prevailing conditions. Instead of trying to set up the communal type of village and land system which they had found so practical in Russia, they bought individual farms, moved onto

1. Friesen, *Die Alt-evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland*, 144-163, *passim*.

them, and began to till the soil. Where previous owners had erected buildings on the farms, the Mennonites moved into them and used them as they were, but those that bought new land and had sufficient means, sought to reproduce the type of structure which they had known in Russia. Instead of erecting several small buildings, they built one large structure so arranged and constructed as to provide comfortable living quarters for the family, adequate room for livestock, grain, feed, and machinery—all of this under one roof. In Russia the all-purpose structure was usually built of brick and heavy lumber, but here financial limitations necessitated the substitution of stone or wood for the brick. The majority of the Mennonites found the American architecture more convenient and practical.

It was natural for the Mennonites to try to farm in America in much the same manner that they had farmed in Russia, but they soon discovered that they had to change some of their methods. The Russian soil was so productive that the farmer could usually expect a fair crop from poorly tilled fields, and it was not uncommon to sow the seed broadcast by hand upon stubble fields that had scarcely been touched by tillage implements. During the first years in the new home, when grasshoppers, rust and blight kept them poor, the Mennonite farmers found that poor cultivation was little better than none at all, but it was hard to do better work without the proper implements, and many of them did not have the money to buy them. The cost and difficulty of transporting farm machinery prevented them from bringing much with them, and it was well that they did not, for it was inferior to American equipment. As their economic condition improved, they acquired the needed implements and learned to till the soil to better advantage.

Quite a few of the Mennonites brought with them farm wagons which were products of their own craftsmen. These vehicles proved to be quite impractical because they were narrow-gauge and had low wheels with narrow tires, causing them to mire easily in the muddy prairie trails. Many of the farmers brought with them the tools that they used in their secondary vocations and found them very useful to themselves and their neighbors. Wheelwrights, carpenters, blacksmiths, and men trained in other trades proved a boon to the poorer Mennonite farmers because they could make many of the simpler farm implements at a smaller cost than that at which they could be bought. Harrows were often assembled by the farmer himself after the metal parts were prepared by some neighbor blacksmith. Some of the farmers used the crude type of

threshing implement that was in use in Russia at that time—a large, heavy, cylindrical block of wood or stone with lengthwise corrugations. This contrivance drawn by one or two oxen was used to beat the grain out of the straw on a threshing floor. The final separation was made by winnowing. The local farmers bought American threshing machines as soon as they were able to do so.

Among the things brought along to this community by the Mennonites were various kinds of farm and garden seeds. The wheat was too soft to be used for flour, and the flax was not as good as American varieties, but the barley and oats seemed to thrive fairly well, as did many of the garden seeds, such as water-melon, a great favorite. They also brought with them a variety of olive trees or bushes which they planted individually or in hedges. The fruit, a small oil-berry, was eaten off the trees late in the growing season after the first light frosts. It is probable that they also brought with them mulberry trees which were grown extensively by the Mennonites in Russia to feed their silkworms. Nearly every local Mennonite farmer planted a row of half a dozen or more mulberry trees, but the raising of silkworms was apparently never attempted in Minnesota, as it was among the Mennonites who settled in Kansas.

During the first two decades of their abode in Minnesota the Mennonites experienced difficulties and hardships that kept their economic progress down to a very low rate. The grasshoppers kept the majority of them at or near the subsistence level until 1877 when the devourers completely disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as they had come to the community in 1873. Each season the mature grasshoppers laid their eggs in the ground, and in the following spring the young insects began to eat where they hatched. It is said that swarms of them, before their wings matured, invaded green fields and devoured every growing blade of grass, grain, and weed as they moved in, leaving the black soil behind them bleak and bare in the scorching sun. The noise of their feeding was clearly audible to anyone passing by. Sometimes they were so numerous that they ate the roots out of the ground to satisfy their voracious appetites. During the middle and late summer, after their wings had matured, great swarms of them darkened the sky and obscured the sun like mighty thunder clouds, and the sound of the millions of wings was like the steady hum and roar of a storm approaching from a distance. Their coming down seemed like the falling of light hail or heavy raindrops. They covered everything in sight and found their way into anything that could be entered. One

day in July, 1874, a great swarm arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon and by five o'clock all the heads of the ripening wheat were cut off and lying on the ground.² At such times they stalled railroad trains by causing the drive wheels of the locomotives to slip, and sand or gravel had to be thrown on the rails to provide traction. The destruction which they caused was not always complete in each season, nor was it always uniformly serious in all parts of the community. Nearly every year there were farmers who received enough of a crop to support themselves and probably help some of their friends and relatives. Those who suffered most obtained government relief which was locally administered by Paul Seeger.

The grasshopper years were immediately followed by severe visitations of blight and rust which were almost as bad in their effect on the crops as was the grasshopper scourge. After 1880 the crops were somewhat better on the whole, but weather conditions were usually far from ideal. Many of the winters were severe and the summer seasons were usually either too wet or too dry. The summers of 1880 and 1881 were very wet with an extraordinary winter between them. The first snow fell in October, 1880, and winter did not break until about the middle of April, 1881. According to one pioneer there were thirty-two snow storms during this time. The snow was so deep in the country that they could not travel with animals for many months, and the farmers had to walk to town with little hand-sleds to get provisions which ran low everywhere because train service was very irregular and sometimes impossible for several weeks at a time. In February, 1881, a passenger train was stalled at the village for about two weeks. It cost the railroad company great sums of money to clear the tracks, the opening of one cut alone costing \$500. With the farmers the feed and fuel problem became quite acute, for the snow drifts were at times so high that they had to enter the barn through the door of the hay-loft or through a hole in the roof, and the haystacks were covered so completely that they could not find them except by digging down at the places where they thought the hay was. One farmer's house was so weighted down with snow that one side of the roof collapsed, and the family had to move in with the neighbors.³ Aside from the hardships mentioned and the high prices that had to be paid for provisions, there was apparently no suffering in the community.

2. This event was described to the writer in great detail by S. S. Gillam, an American pioneer living in Windom, the county seat of Cottonwood county.

3. The larger portion of this information concerning the severe winter of 1880-1 was obtained from reports written by local Mennonites and published in *Zur Heimath*, January to June, 1881.

The year of 1882 was a welcome break in the monotonous succession of poor crops, for the crops were much better than usual. One farmer raised enough flax that summer to pay all the debts he had incurred in coming to Minnesota, including the money he owed on his 160-acre farm which he had purchased five years before from an American at \$12.50 an acre.⁴ In succeeding years crops were generally better than they had been before and by about 1890 or 1895 conditions were becoming better to the extent that the people no longer wished that they had remained in Russia, or that they had settled elsewhere in America, as some of them did in the earlier days when the labor of their hands went for naught year after year. During the wet years in the early eighties a group of forty-four Mennonites packed up their goods and moved to Kansas.⁵ Many more wished to go at that time, but they could not leave because they were too poor.

Grasshoppers, drought, rain, snow, rust, and blight were conditions or forces outside of human control, but they were not the only causes of retarded economic progress in the community before 1890. Poor farming methods, for so they seem in comparison to modern methods, contributed somewhat to the slow advance of material well being. Chief among the evils of that period was the prevailing practice of single-crop farming which was disadvantageous in two ways. First, the failure of a single source of cash income left the farmer practically penniless, in spite of the fact that his farm was more self-sufficient than the modern farm is today, for he raised other crops, livestock, poultry, and farm produce in sufficient quantities to supply home needs. When wheat, which was the one and only cash crop up to about 1880, and flax, which temporarily overshadowed wheat during the eighties, failed in either yield or price, the farmer's income was cut proportionately, for the market for other farm products was rather limited. The other important disadvantage of one-crop farming was the exhaustion of the soil's fertility by the successive planting of the same crop year after year which reduced the yield greatly.

The decade of the nineties marked a turning point in the economic development of the community. Up to that time the Mennonites struggled against great odds to maintain their existence and to secure the necessities of life. Sometimes the struggle seemed hopeless in the face of discouraging circumstances, and many tears were shed by the immigrants who remembered the comforts of their

4. This farmer was Jacob Balzer, the father of J. J. Balzer.

5. This fact was recorded by Peter C. Wiens in his history of the local Mennonite Brethren Church..

old home in Russia. Many times they were fortunate and thankful to have the bare necessities of life when crops failed or were destroyed by natural forces. There was resentment against those individuals who had induced them to come to Minnesota, and quite a few would have moved away if poverty had not compelled them to stay. But most of these things were forgotten in the nineties with the improvement of economic conditions to the point where they need no longer be content with the bare necessities of life and could enjoy some of the comforts of life.

During the nineties the crops were better than they had been, consequently the farmers were making enough money, in spite of depression prices for some time after 1893, to build new houses and barns, buy new machinery, and in other ways improve their material circumstances. One farmer visited the Chicago Exposition in 1893.⁶ Eight years later he retired from active farming and moved to the village where he bought a lot and built a new house and barn, paying cash for them, but he did not sell his farm of 240 acres. Another evidence that the farmers were fairly well off financially was the emigration of some 200 families of Mennonites from the community to North Dakota and Canada between 1896 and 1902.⁷ They were not driven away by economic necessity, for they carried away with them long train-loads of livestock, farm equipment, and household goods, but were rather attracted to these other regions by the prospect of easily making large profits from the free or cheap land to be obtained there.

The expansion of the village during this decade reflected the improvement of conditions because it was then, as it always has been, wholly dependent on the development and prosperity of local agriculture. When the first Mennonite settlers arrived, the village consisted of about a dozen houses, three stores, and a railroad station. The coming of such a large number of new residents to the community in 1873-80 brought about a corresponding increase in the population and business interests of the village. Most of the new business men from 1875 on were Mennonites, partly because they had the ability and opportunity, and partly because they were preferred by their own people, making it more difficult for non-Mennonites to succeed. Abram Penner was the first Mennonite to become a business man, building his first store in 1875. Three years later the village consisted of sixty houses, five stores, two flour and grist mills, two lumber yards, two blacksmith shops, two

6. Cornelius Janzen gave this information about himself in his chronicle.

7. Rempel chronicle.

large grain elevators, one hotel, one saloon, and one implement shop.⁸ All the business establishments except three stores, one lumberyard, one elevator, the hotel, and the saloon were owned and operated by Mennonites. The estimated population was about 250 inhabitants.⁹ During the next ten years the village grew rather slowly, for there was little business expansion, although the population increased sufficiently to permit the village to separate from Mountain Lake township in 1886 and become an incorporated municipality with about 306 inhabitants.

From 1890 to 1900 the village grew quite rapidly. The population more than doubled, the greatest increase coming in the last five years in which the number of inhabitants rose from 595 to 959. Twelve new business enterprises were founded, seven established firms built new buildings or enlarged their old quarters, two new churches were erected, and the municipality built a fire station. Among the new firms were a bank, a drugstore, two grain elevators, two saloons, an implement shop, a hardware store, a carpenter's workshop, and a creamery. An undetermined number of residences were erected to house the additional population. 1890, 1893, and 1897 were the years of greatest business expansion.¹⁰ In the twelve months after May, 1893, a depression year, some \$20,000 worth in buildings was added to the wealth of the village.¹¹ The prosperity and expansion of the village and its business interests were dependent directly upon the success of local agriculture, for when the farmer could not buy, the merchant could not sell his wares.

Since local agriculture became an assured success in the nineties, the Mennonites experienced great improvement in their economic circumstances, their progress being quite consistent and steady except as retarded or accelerated by events and conditions beyond local control, such as depressions, wars, unfavorable weather conditions, general prosperity, and the like. General crop failures occurred only twice since 1900,—in 1911 and 1919, the causes being drought and heavy rainfall, respectively. In 1934 and 1936 the crops were considerably below average on account of drought, but higher prices largely made up for the loss in yield. The World War distinctly accelerated farming operations in the community because of the great demand for staple food stuffs. The high prices offered for farm products caused the local farmers to put under culti-

8. From a description of the village published in the *Tagliche Volkszeitung*, July 19, 1878.

9. This estimate is based on the assumption that the sixty houses of the village contained an average of at least four inhabitants each.

10. Rempel Chronicle.

11. *Cottonwood County Plat Book*, 1896.

vation every acre of ground that could be made to produce anything. It so happened that the war years were unusually wet seasons so that every lake, swamp, and depression was filled with water so much of the time that a great deal of land failed to produce paying crops. Thousands of dollars were spent by the farmers for drain tile and labor to reclaim such land. Following the war the boom-time of the twenties did not bring the local farmer as much of the general prosperity as he thought he should have because, he complained continually, the prices he had to pay were much higher than the prices which he received for his products, but he who knew how to manage his farm properly, made money in spite of that situation. The Great Depression of recent years caught the farmer unawares and reduced his income drastically, making it exceedingly difficult for him to meet current expenses and practically impossible to pay as much as the interest on old obligations. The number of Mennonite farmers who lost their farms was not very large, the most important cause being the difficulty or inability to meet old obligations. The majority of the farmers survived the hard times by their industry, thrift, and economy, the degree of their success depending to a large extent on the application of business methods to the management of their farms.

The development and progress of local agriculture and the dependent economic interests of the village were accompanied and to a considerable degree facilitated by the operation of three important factors—the progressive diversification of farming activities, the mechanization of agricultural operations, and the application of more scientific methods to agriculture.

Diversification was the most important of these three factors because of its influence in making farming a financial success by multiplying the number and variety of sources of cash income, thereby reducing the chances of total failure in any one year. There was little diversification in the community until after 1890 when the farmers began to supplement their income from wheat and flax with the production and sale of livestock of various kinds, such as beef-cattle, sheep, hogs, and poultry. Dairying as a local industry began to develop in the nineties, and a creamery was established in the village in the first half of the decade. When the farmers began to raise cattle, hogs, and poultry for the market and to build up their dairy herds for market production, the feed crops became increasingly important and gradually displaced wheat and flax to the extent that the latter became relatively unimportant as cash crops. As oats, barley, and corn increased in

importance as feed crops, the market for them became better, so that the farmer could usually sell his surplus at a fair price. When the Mennonites settled in the community, they raised little or no corn because they thought it was not good for the soil, but by the end of the century they learned to appreciate its value as a feed crop and began to cultivate it in increasing amounts. When the local farmers learned to appreciate its values, diversification became the rule rather than the exception, and it has tended to become more varied with the passing of time.

The Mennonite pioneers did most of their farming with oxen in the first few years of settlement. As their financial condition improved, they replaced their oxen with horses as their main motive power, and supplied themselves with American implements, principally plows, harvesting machines, and threshing machines before 1890. Although the Mennonites were generally quite conservative, they were fairly progressive in the adoption of agricultural machinery. The early horsepower engine was followed successively by the stationary horse-drawn steam engine, the traction steam engine that had to be steered by hand with a wagon tongue, the traction engine with complete steering apparatus, and finally the gasoline tractor. The first of the gasoline tractors, which were introduced into the community shortly before the World War, were clumsy giants with monstrous drive-wheels that were used for little besides threshing and road-grading. The World War period with its high prices and the profitable post war decade ushered in the era of power farming. In the former period the farmers began to buy the medium sized tractors that greatly increased the earning power of the individual farmer and tractor power gradually displaced horses for the performance of the heavier farming operations. As succeeding tractor models became smaller and more mobile and easier to manipulate, the use of mechanical power became quite general by 1930. The depression did no more than retard the process of farm mechanization which has reached the point where it is unusual for any farmer not to own a tractor and a more or less complete line of power machinery.

As the diversification of farming progressed, and better and more economical and efficient implements became available, the farmers slowly improved their methods, partly as a result of experience and partly as a result of the influence of agencies that disseminate information designed to aid the farmer. The increase in the number of crops produced greatly facilitated the systematic rotation of crops, while the increase in the acreage planted

with corn aided in the control of weeds. Dairying, the raising of livestock, and the introduction of legumes for grazing and hay made possible better conservation or replenishment of the soil's fertility. In connection with the raising of livestock they learned more about the selection, breeding, care, and feeding of the animals according to the purpose for which they were intended. Very few of the local farmers obtained any formal agricultural education. Farm newspapers, the radio, farm organizations, and similar agencies were the sources of information which they found increasingly available and useful for the improvement of their occupation.

The average size of farms in the community today is about 200 acres, and about 65 percent of the farmers own the farms they operate,¹² as compared to 57 percent for Cottonwood and Watonwan Counties, 66 percent for Minnesota,¹³ and 58 percent for the United States.¹³ The average Mennonite farm is equipped with a set of well-kept reasonably modern buildings consisting of a house of about seven rooms, a good-sized barn with a large hay mow, a granary, a chicken barn, a hog barn, a machine-shed, a corn crib, a crib, pit, or conventional upright silo, a windmill, a garage, and a few smaller structures. The mechanical equipment consists of a tractor, usually of the general purpose row-crop type, with a partially complete line of power implements, a supplementary line of horse-drawn tillage and harvesting implements, a small gasoline engine for small power jobs, a medium-sized or light delivery truck besides the usual family passenger car, and possibly a gas-electric light and power plant. If he does not own and operate a small threshing machine, one of his five or six nearest neighbors is sure to have one.

The farmyard is quite spacious and so arranged that all buildings are readily accessible. Every farm has a large grove of about one hundred or more trees. The most common varieties of shade trees are the poplar or cottonwood, boxelder, willow, maple, ash, and evergreens. A considerable part of the grove is made up of fruit trees such as apple, plum, cherry, mulberry, and chokecherry. Lilac, snowball, and bridal wreath are the most common ornamental shrubs. Every housewife takes pride in her garden in which she cultivates flowers, a wide variety of vegetables, a patch of strawberries, a patch of blackberries and raspberries, gooseberry and

12. This figure is based on data obtained from the *Watonwan and Cottonwood County Directory*, 1937-8.

13. *Minneapolis Journal*, July 5, 1937.

THIRD AVENUE— in the horse-and-buggy days



Once it was the Public School — Here it is a Hospital
Now it is the Old Folks' Home



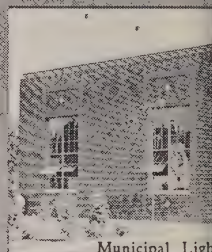
THIRD AVENUE— under the sway of the Model-T Ford



Public School



THIRD AVENUE— streamlined, 1938



Municipal Light

PUBLIC AND COOPERATIVE



Bible School



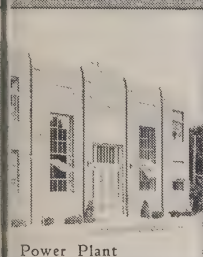
Cooperative Farmers Elevator Company



ern Hospital, with Nurses' Home and Old Folks' Home



Cooperative Oil Association



Power Plant



Cooperative Creamery Association

CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISES

currant bushes, and a plentiful supply of tomatoes and water-melons. Occasionally surplus garden produce may be sold in the neighborhood.

The average Mennonite farmer owns about 20 to 30 head of cattle, dairy cows making up about half that number. The remainder is made up of young heifers, calves, and a small group of steers that are being fattened for the market. Although power farming has come to stay, each farmer still keeps from four to six horses which are needed especially in seed-time and harvest, as well as for odd jobs around the farm throughout the year. Each farmer raises from 15 to 50 hogs, 100 to 500 chickens, a small flock of sheep, and possibly some ducks, geese, or turkeys.

The crops produced on the farm form the basis for all other farming operations, for they must not only supply nearly all the feed that is needed for livestock, but also furnish a part of the farmer's cash income. In order to get the maximum value out of his land, the farmer cultivates his entire acreage when that is possible. About one-half of the total cultivated area is devoted to corn, barley and oats which are used for feed primarily, but may be sold to advantage on the market.

A large share of the remaining acreage is used to produce essential feed supplies, such as sweet clover for pasture, alfalfa for hay, fodder corn for ensilage, and possibly some millet for chicken feed. Usually the farmer will raise small acreages of flax, and possibly wheat or rye, which are sold for cash.

The modern farm with its wide variety of activities and processes is a very complex business in comparison to the typical single-crop farm of two generations ago when the first Mennonites came to the community. The modern farmer is a full time worker throughout the year, for in winter his livestock keeps him almost as busy as he is in any of the other seasons. What little leisure time he has is needed for the keeping of adequate financial accounts and for the planning of his increasingly complex and numerous activities, all of which have their individual methods and techniques. If they manage wisely, the local Mennonite farmers are reasonably secure because the diversity of their sources of income assures them of at least a living in times of stress. When crops, prices, and circumstances in general are normal, he has no just cause for complaint.

The growth of the village of Mountain Lake generally followed quite closely the trends in local agricultural development. Following the decade of rapid growth just before the turn of the century, the village increased much more slowly during the next ten years. The successful launching of a second bank in the village reflected a reasonable degree of prosperity in local business. Construction activities included the erection of a large public school building, the installation of a city water-works system, the building of the private German school house, the erection of a \$12,000 building to house the First State Bank, and the building of a cooperative creamery. The Cooperative Farmers' Elevator Association was formed in 1901. The World War decade witnessed an accelerated rate of expansion in the commercial interests of the village. Not only did the established firms experience a great increase in the volume of business as a result of the agricultural expansion, but some new lines of business enterprise were introduced. The coming of the automobile led to the establishment of garages for the sale and repair of automobiles and brought with it the petroleum products-distribution business. The latter was also stimulated by the increasing use of tractors among the farmers. During the decade following the World War local business shared in the general prosperity, for the crops were generally good and the farmers spent money quite readily for construction, new equipment, and material comforts. As the farmers became less self-sufficient, and bought more manufactured goods to supply their increasing wants, local business concerns grew in volume of business, and new firms came into existence. Construction activities reflect the increase in the number of business interests, for approximately twenty sizable buildings were erected in this period, and about half of them were built by new firms. With a few exceptions they were built of fire-proof materials. The most important of the new structures were a large hotel, a clinic pharmacy with hospital facilities, a bank building, several garages and oil stations, a large hardware store, a theater, two feed mills, a barber shop, a hotel-restaurant, a modern hospital and nurses' home, and a meat market. The Great Depression drastically reduced the volume of local business, but did not cause many failures. Practically all the old established firms except the banks weathered the crisis in fair condition. The First National Bank failed and closed its doors at the beginning of the depression, and the First State Bank evaded the prospect of failure by merging with the Farmers State Bank which was established shortly after the close of the World War. It survived the hard times as one of the strongest banks in the southern part of the state. Since 1935 local business as well as agriculture has improved

slowly, especially during the past year when construction activities were resumed after a slump that began early in the depression.

Economic conditions in the community have improved to the point where the people of the community are quite optimistic concerning the future. Although conditions have not returned to the level that was regarded as normal in pre-depression years, 1937 was the best all around year for business and agriculture since the coming of the Great Depression.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN LAKE AS A MENNONITE COMMUNITY

Religious History

The distinctive characteristic of the Mennonites has always been their religious faith, for they originated primarily as a religious group, so that the term, Mennonite, has no significance except as a religious designation. Whatever developed among them in the way of peculiar patterns of life and practice along economic, social, cultural, political, or other lines were incidental outcomes of their long-continued existence as a distinct religious group. It is therefore a matter of vital concern in this study to note the main features of Mennonite faith and practice.

Because of the significance of Menno Simon in the origin and early development of the Mennonite denomination, his teachings as contained in his writings constitute the primary source for the determination of the essential principles of Mennonite doctrine and practice. Simon's fundamental doctrine was belief in an infinite, sovereign God who revealed himself to man in all ages, the final revelation appearing in visible form in the person of Christ, his Son. Christ came the first time to die for the redemption of man, and was to return to receive the true church and ultimately to judge the whole world. He regarded the Bible as the record of God's revelation to man, the New Testament being the complement and fulfilment of the Old Testament, and as the supreme authority for the determination of religious faith and practice. Man was created by God, fell from God's grace through disobedience, and cannot be restored to right relationship to God except through recognition of his sinfulness, sincere repentance, and acceptance by faith of the redemptive work of Christ. The believer was a citizen of the world to come and was to live so as to be ready at all times for the return of Christ, his master and example, but in another sense he was to live as though Christ would not come in his life-time, practicing a peaceable, truthful, sincere, useful life, obeying the government in all matters not contrary to his religion. He should abstain from all use of force

or compulsion over his fellow-men, not even resisting persecution which he must inevitably suffer for the sake of his faith, for the meting out of all vengeance and judgment was solely God's prerogative. Simon's church organization was similar to that of the modern Congregational denomination. Each group of believers constituted an independent church whose highest authority was the majority vote of its male members, known as a "Bruderschaft" or brotherhood. The three ranks of church leaders, the "Aeltester" (Bishop), "Prediger" or "Lehrer" (assistant preachers), and the deacons, were elected by the members of the congregation and served for life, but could be removed from office by the people. The leaders of two or more churches met for conferences, but their decisions were not mandatory upon the churches represented. Members were admitted on one and only one condition, namely, confession before the congregation of conversion by faith in the redemptive work of Christ, whereupon baptism was administered as symbolical of the inward transformation. Wayward members were disciplined by means of the ban (exclusion from the church). The Lord's Supper was observed as purely symbolical of the suffering and death of Christ, and it was commonly followed by the washing of feet. Simon endeavored sincerely to establish a pure church, having in mind the early apostolic church as his ideal and supreme example.¹

In common with practically all Protestant denominations the Mennonites have experienced an almost endless number of schisms and divisions over causes ranging from hair splitting doctrinal disputes to petty personal quarrels. Frequently divisions resulted from mere differences of opinion in non-essential matters, such as dress, form of baptism, or details of church discipline or policy, but the most significant divisions were expressions of revolt by small but energetic minorities against the characteristic tendency of religion to crystalize and degenerate into rigid systems of ritual and formalism which is usually accompanied by a corresponding loss of inner spiritual vitality and emphasis on personal experience as essential to true Christian living. Wherever the Mennonites settled, their history was full of divisions which were easily effected because of their highly de-centralized and democratic organization.

The Mennonite colonies in Russia were no exception. When the Mennonites first settled in Russia, they brought with them some of the divisions which dated back to the time when their fore-fathers lived in Holland. After they had overcome the first

1. Cornelius Krahn, *Menno Simons*, passim.

hardships of pioneer life they became increasingly complacent and indifferent to the spirit of Menno Simon's teachings although they faithfully maintained the outward forms. This trend was strongly influenced by the conditions and provisions of the Imperial charter which formed the basis for their privileged status in Russia. In order to enjoy the unusual privileges therein granted they had to be official members of a Mennonite church. The children of Mennonite parents could not legally become eligible to enjoy those same privileges unless they became members of the church, and joining the church degenerated into an empty formality consisting of catechetical training followed by baptism and reception into the congregation. Menno Simon's emphasis on genuine heart conversion and devout Christian living that went deeper than the mere observance of outward rites and formalities was wholly lost from the thought and practice of the majority of the people. The prohibition of missionary activity on the part of the Mennonites among the native Russians also removed a primary incentive for vital and positive evangelism among themselves. There was always a small minority among them who recognized the tendency and sought to work against it, but it was almost impossible for any protesting groups to accomplish anything because the high degree of local autonomy granted to the Mennonites by the charter made it possible for the majority to control such groups by excluding them from the official Mennonite society. Exclusion was a very effective check because it involved reduction in legal status to the level of the native Russians, with a consequent loss of special privileges, but the protesting element grew stronger with the passing of time and made a direct appeal to the Imperial Government for complete religious freedom and toleration within the Mennonite colonies. The grant of this petition in 1862 made possible the establishment of individual churches that sought to return to the teachings of Menno Simon and restored the principle of complete autonomy for the individual church, so that from this time on there was wide variation in religious life among the churches, ranging from cold formalism that made religion an empty or even hypocritical profession to genuine, sincere, sane, and wholesome Christian living.² Although all churches subscribed to one or another of the Mennonite creeds, each church developed its own pattern of particular beliefs, customs, forms, and the like.

The Mennonites who settled at Mountain Lake came from over fifty different Mennonite villages in Russia and represented nearly as many different individual churches. Many of the settlers were

2. Friesen, *Alt-evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 1:70-200, *passim*.

strangers to each other before coming to this community because their old homes were widely separated. The conditions of pioneer settlement made it difficult for them to get acquainted, and formal church organizations were not affected immediately, but by 1880 the religious interests and activities of the community were fairly well organized and proceeded to function as an important part of community life. In many respects the religious history of the community resembled the religious history of the Mennonites in Russia up to about 1870, and the particular points of similarity will be noted in the course of the following account.

During the first two or three years after the Mennonites began to settle in the community some of the American religious denominations regarded them as very fruitful ground for evangelistic activity and expended a great deal of effort in the conducting of revival services and Bible study classes with the ultimate aim of organizing churches in the community, the Methodists, Evangelicals, and Baptists being the most active. Karl Wendt, a Baptist preacher, was the most successful of these evangelists, for he succeeded in effecting an organization meeting of an interested group of Mennonites, but it proved unsuccessful because the latter could not accept the Baptist views on military service, the taking of the oath, and baptism.³ On the whole, the Mennonites were much too cautious to suit the fancy of the American religious workers.

The absence of organized churches in the community during the first years was keenly felt by the Mennonite settlers and they tried to maintain their religious life by worship services conducted in homes in different parts of the community. At these neighborhood meetings they became acquainted with each other and discussed plans for the establishment of regular church organizations, but it was difficult for them to come to any definite agreements because of the great diversity of opinion among them. Each individual wanted the new church to be modeled after the church to which he had belonged in his former home. Some of them wanted the ceremony of foot-washing to be observed on Saturday preceding the Sunday when they were to partake of the Lord's supper, while others wanted to omit that rite altogether. There was disagreement as to whether sermons should be oral or read from written manuscripts, whether prayer should be audible and public or not, whether the congregational singing should be performed in unison or in harmonizing parts, whether there should be missionary services or not,

3. J. J. Balzer "Entstehung und Entwicklung unserer Gemeinden", *Jubiläumsfeier*, 23-24.

and similar questions.⁴ Another drawback was the lack of strong experienced leadership that could win sufficient support to effect a successful organization. All of the ordained elders and bishops that had come to America had settled elsewhere and the few preachers who came to Mountain Lake were either too young and inexperienced or lacked some other quality of leadership demanded by the situation. David Schroeder, a member of the first group of settlers that came in 1873, was the most able and energetic leader among them, but his following was small and opposition against him was strong because of his liberal ideas concerning outward forms of religion. One particular cause of opposition against him was his rather free association and cooperation with the American ministers and evangelists who conducted services in the community. Although he was directly or indirectly instrumental in the organization of at least two local churches, he never affiliated permanently with any church because his broad conception of fellowship and cooperation among Christians regardless of outward form or denominational affiliation did not find room within the narrow confines of the church organizations of his day.⁵

In the summer of 1876 a fairly large group of people achieved a degree of unanimity that made possible the establishment of the first Mennonite church body at Mountain Lake. Because of the lack of an elder in their midst they invited Wilhelm Ewert, an immigrant bishop who had settled at Hillsboro, Kansas, to assist them in the formal organization proceedings, particularly in the drafting of the articles of faith and the election and ordination of an elder. The organization was completed on August 18, 1876, with the election of Aaron Wall by a small majority over the other candidates, among whom David Schroeder was the most prominent aspirant. Economic conditions delayed the erection of a church building until 1880, so the six preachers who belonged to the church went to different parts of the community each Sunday to conduct worship services in the homes of members.⁶ The congregation was known for many years as the Wall Church, being named after the leader, Aaron Wall.

Another church was established in 1877 under the leadership of David Loewen, Henry Schultz, and others. Elder Aaron Wall of the other church refused to perform the ordination of David

4. *Ibid.*

5. Rempel Chronicle.

6. Balzer in *Jubiläumsfeier*, 24. Also Wilhelm Ewert in a report of the occasion published in *Zur Heimath*, November, 1876.

Loewen and John Schultz, who were elected to the ministry by the new congregation, and so David Schroeder, who was an ordained minister, was invited to perform that ceremony. In the following year Rev. George Neufeld, a newly arrived immigrant, was elected elder or bishop of the congregation and was installed in the office by Bishop Gerhard Wiebe of Manitoba. An affiliated branch of this church was also established in the northeastern part of the Mennonite settlement known as Bergthal. This church was commonly known as the Neufeld Church, but its official name was the First Mennonite Church of Mountain Lake.⁷ This congregation was likewise unable to build a church building immediately and met for some years in the machine shed of the Janzen farm a short distance west of the village.⁸ The first church building was erected in 1882 about three blocks west of the business district in the village.

The Mennonite Brethren Church was established early in the same year (1877), but it was not formally organized because its members came from affiliated churches of that same name in Russia. The congregation was quite small at the time, but grew quite rapidly in succeeding years. One of the first preachers in this church was Heinrich Voth who was elected to that calling on July 15, 1877, about a month after he became a member. Most of the members lived northwest of the Mountain Lake village in or near Carson township and met for their weekly services in the different homes until they could build a church in 1885 about seven miles northwest of the village.⁹

These three churches still did not include all the Mennonites living in the community, but the neutral or unaffiliated individuals were unable to effect a permanent organization, although they elected one of their number, Abraham Hiebert, to serve them as minister. He was ordained by David Schroeder,¹⁰ who was one of the leaders. This group gradually dwindled down to a small number because many of them joined the organized churches.

To most of the Mennonites who came to Minnesota their religion was largely a matter of tradition. They were Mennonites because their parents had brought them up to be Mennonites. They joined the church as a matter of course and learned to observe faithfully the outward forms of their faith. Church attendance

7. Balzer in *Jubilaumsfeier*, 24.

8. I. I. Borgen in a personal interview.

9. Peter C. Wiens in his unpublished history of the Mennonite Brethren Church at Mountain Lake.

10. Balzer in *Jubilaumsfeier*, 24.

became habitual because they were expected to be in church once each week—on Sunday morning—to sit through a service that contributed little toward either spiritual or esthetic inspiration and uplift. The congregational singing was little better than could be endured. The whole congregation sang in unison from songbooks without notes, using old tunes that were passed on from generation to generation. Three or four men with powerful voices acted as “Vorsanger”—they were given seats in the front of the church facing the people and when a hymn was announced set the pitch and led the singing with their voices. Instrumental music and part-singing were forbidden. The sermons were literally taken from old Lutheran sermon books and read haltingly from poorly written manuscripts by the untrained and unpaid preachers. Missionary interest, with a few exceptions, was wholly lacking. Joining the church was a fairly simple matter for the young people. They attended catechism classes every Sunday from Easter until Pentecost Sunday, on which day they were baptized and finally received into fellowship.¹¹ Menno Simon’s primary requirement for church membership, conversion, was hardly mentioned, much less explained, and with few exceptions, never emphasized.¹²

These conditions were not universal in the community, however, for the conditions varied from church to church. The First Mennonite Church was the least spiritual and the most formal of them all. Gerhard Neufeld, who was the bishop of this church until his death in 1916, was in a large measure responsible for this situation, for he was satisfied with the observance of the letter of the law and showed little concern for deeper and more vital understanding and practice of Christian teachings.¹³ The Wall Church was also strongly affected by the character of its leader, Aaron Wall. He was quite conservative in his insistence on outward forms, such as the wearing of certain kinds of clothes, but he believed that true religion was more than just doing certain things—that it was primarily concerned with the condition of man’s inner life, and he therefore preached conversion to some extent. He was not a very forceful leader and could not dominate the church completely. The majority of the members were satisfied with the minimum essentials of outward religious form.¹⁴

11. *Ibid.*

12. Various interviews.

13. Rempel chronicle.

14. Various interviews.

The Mennonite Brethren Church, however, was an exception to the conditions described above, for it represented a revolt against the general emptiness of Mennonite religious form. The local members came from churches of the same name in Russia that sought to return to the spirit and life of Menno Simon's teachings and therefore strictly required conversion as a prerequisite to church membership. The vast majority of the Mennonites in Russia were content with their religious formalism and vigorously opposed the reform movement by using against them the powers of local government and church discipline. The ban was used not only to exclude them from the church but to ruin them economically by forbidding all intercourse with them. To render them any aid was made punishable by law. Some of the Brethren were jailed and some of their leaders were threatened with banishment to Siberia. The Brethren were undaunted in the face of such persecution from their own people and appealed directly to the Imperial Government for full legal recognition as Mennonites under the charter of privileges, arguing on the basis of Menno Simon's writings that they were the true followers of their founder, and pointing out how their persecutors had departed from Simon's teachings. In 1862 the Russian officials recognized the justice of their cause and compelled their persecutors to grant them full equality. This they did very grudgingly. For many years thereafter the Brethren suffered the more refined types of persecution such as derision and social ostracism.¹⁵ The small number of Brethren who came to this community were looked down upon by the other Mennonites in the same way as in Russia and therefore were not particularly welcome in the new home, but they were earnestly evangelistic and conducted regular Bible study and prayer services to which they invited all who would condescend to come. Through these services considerable numbers of people from outside of their group were converted and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church which became so large by 1883 that a separate congregation was formed about five miles south of the village¹⁶ where they built a church in 1890.

During the decade of the eighties the Mennonite community experienced a marked increase of interest in the deeper meanings of religion. There were a number of causes that influenced this tendency. One was the work and activity of the Mennonite Brethren whose success in winning converts stimulated the other churches to greater activity. The emigration from Russia, the hardships connected with the long journey, the hardships and difficulties of

15. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 1:70-200, *passim*.

16. Balzer in *Jubiläumsfeier*, 26.

pioneer life, and the activities of the American evangelists among them caused many of the people to think more seriously about the deeper meanings and values of religion. This stimulation of religious interest manifested itself in the spontaneous organization of neighborhood Sunday schools and Bible classes that were not directly connected with the churches. The first Sunday schools were started in 1876 or 1877 and within a few years there were schools held in private homes in practically every part of the community. At the same time private day schools were conducted in their own homes by individuals in many different parts of the community who were interested in the religious education of the children and young people. In 1886 a German school society was organized in the village. J. J. Balzer and I. I. Borgen were appointed to establish a German-English preparatory school. They also organized an independent Sunday school which was very well attended, and attracted the attention of the churches which had no Sunday schools as yet, except the Mennonite Brethren Church, because many of the older people did not want them. In 1888 the Wall Church yielded to the demand of the young people for the establishment of a Sunday school in connection with the church. For a few months the school prospered and brought a larger attendance of young people to the church, but some of the older members could not (or probably would not) get used to the constant murmur of voices during the session and objected very strenuously. This precipitated a crisis in the church that resulted in a three-fold division of the congregation.

The causes for this schism lay deeper than the Sunday school question, for there was friction in the congregation for some years before this time. Elder Wall was more or less the center of the conditions that led to the break. At the founding of the church in 1876 he was elected by a very small majority, which showed that he did not have the unanimous support of the members. As time wore on Elder Wall failed to win the support of the majority because of his emphasis on conversion and a more sincere type of Christian living. When the Sunday school question brought on the crisis, Wall was not able to prevent an open break and resigned his office. About one third of the congregation followed his leadership in the establishment of the church that came to be known as the Bruderthaler church. They built their first building one mile north of the village in 1889. This group was the most spiritual and evangelistic of the three new churches, being very much like the Mennonite Brethren Church in many respects.

Another group of about the same size was made up of those

who most violently opposed the leadership of Elder Wall. They retained the old church building which was located near the northern limits of the village and chose to be known as the Bergfelder Church. The general character and policy of this church was very much like that of the First Mennonite Church in being rather narrowly conservative, clinging to the old traditional forms, and showing little interest in evangelism with its emphasis on conversion.

The third group combined many of the characteristics of the other two, for it was much less conservative than the Bergfelder, but not as evangelistic as the Bruderthaler church, and in some respects more progressive than either one of them. This church, known as the Bethel church, introduced the organ into the regular church services and used four-part singing, largely because of the energy and initiative of its leaders, H. H. Regier and J. J. Balzer, who were much younger men than were most of the leaders of the other churches in the community. Most of the business men of the village belonged to this church, and consequently the new building, erected in 1889, was located just a block west of the business district.¹⁷

From the beginning of the nineties to the World War the religious life of the community was not interrupted by any extraordinary developments. A Methodist and a Baptist church were established in this period by local American residents with the support of a few individual Mennonites, but both congregations were very small and could not support regular pastors. By the time of the World War both groups had disintegrated and the buildings which they had erected were sold and used for other purposes. Two Lutheran churches were established around 1900 in the southeastern part of the village by small groups of immigrants from "Dreisnitz" village in a German colony in southern Russia. Later these churches united to form the present Lutheran Church with a regular full-time pastor. None of these churches had any marked effect on the local Mennonite churches, for the latter and the Lutherans were mutually exclusive, and the American churches failed to make any noticeable impression upon them.¹⁸

A rapid increase in membership and the improvement of economic conditions enabled several of the churches to erect new and larger buildings during this period. The increase in member-

17. The facts concerning the development of local Sunday schools and the division of the Wall Church were obtained mainly from the Rempel chronicle, *Jubiläumsfeier*, and personal interviews with the pioneers.

18. None of these churches are included in the further account of local religious history.

ship was to a large extent a result of the natural increase of the local Mennonite population, but in the Bethel, the Mennonite Brethren, and the Bruderthaler Churches the greater increase was brought about by the fact that they customarily conducted special revival services which resulted in the conversion of individuals who ordinarily did not come to their churches. Often the converts joined the church in which they were converted. The Bruderthaler Church built the present large building in 1893, only four years after the first church was built. The southern Mennonite Brethren Church moved its building to the southern edge of the village in 1901 and twelve years later erected the present church building. In 1895 the Carson Mennonite Brethren Church built a large addition to the original building that had been built in 1885. In the same year the Bethel Church remodeled and enlarged the original building of 1889 so that it became the largest church in the county. In 1896 an affiliate of the Bethel Church was organized in the village of Butterfield, Watonwan County, that became known as the Salem Church. It was largely composed of Galician Mennonites who settled in and around the village between 1880 and 1890.

The First Mennonite and Bergfelder Churches grew less rapidly because they did not ordinarily conduct evangelistic meetings, except as a measure of self-preservation. The majority of the members did not believe that individuals ought to be converted in order to be church members and saw no need for evangelism at home nor for missionary work elsewhere, except as a philanthropic enterprise in the case of the latter. The young people naturally joined the church just as they were when they reached a certain age and consequently the church increased with the growth of the population. In 1897 the Bergfelder Church organized a separate church for the members who lived in the distant northwestern part of the Mennonite settlement. This congregation moved its church to the newly-founded village of Delft in Carson township in 1906. The Mountain Lake Bergfelder Church built its present building in 1913. The First Mennonite Church built its present structure in Mountain Lake in 1911, and the Berghthal affiliate erected the present church in 1901.¹⁹

The churches made considerable progress during these pre-war years in improving their services. The Bethel Church pioneered the improvement of church music by introducing the organ and four part singing for the congregation. By the end of the

¹⁹. Practically all of the specific data given above concerning the building of the local churches was derived from *Jubilaumsfeier*, and Rempel's chronicle.

period all the churches had permanent Sunday schools as a regular part of the religious program, all of them had regular choirs, and most of them had "Jugendverein" (Christian Endeavor Society). The young people went away for further education in increasing numbers each year and brought back new ideas that tended to make the community more conscious of its American environment. It was inevitable for the churches as well as other local institutions to be affected by American influences in spite of the resistance of the older generation. This tendency was quite evident in the slow introduction of the American language into the churches. In 1917 practically all the people under forty years of age were American-born, most of them had attended the public schools where they had to learn the American language, a small percent had attended high school, and a few had been away to college. The majority of the people could understand the American language and many of the young people could use it fairly well. It was much more difficult to obtain German church music and literature than it was to secure American materials, and so the young people began to sing American songs in the choirs and in the "Jugendverein" programs and Sunday school teachers began to use American lesson materials. From this small beginning the American language progressively, although very slowly, displaced the German language, and today it is only a question of time when the former shall win first place in the local churches.

The improvement in the economic conditions between 1890 and 1917 with the attendant increase in the material comforts and enjoyments of life tended to make the people more complacent and self-sufficient in their religious life. The sudden entrance of the United States into the World War rudely awakened them to the stark realization that not all was as well and as safe as it seemed to them. When they came to live in America they believed that they would never again be threatened with the loss of their ancient principle of non-resistance, which according to the teachings of Menno Simon meant that the Christian should absolutely abstain from the use of force against any one. Simon allowed the government the authority and power to maintain order and punish criminals, but he forbade Christians to bear arms.²⁰ The Mennonites always insisted on the right of freedom from military service. Restriction of this liberty was one of the leading causes for their successive migrations to Germany, Russia, and America. They were attracted to the former two countries by the express guarantee of freedom from

20. Krahn, *Menno Simons*, 164-9.

military service only to have the privilege later withdrawn or seriously restricted.²¹ Although the United States Government did not even so much as imply the grant of this liberty, the Mennonites believed that in America they had at last found a permanent haven of refuge where they would never need to engage in war. This belief was strongly encouraged by special legislation enacted by state and provincial governments that appeared to guarantee this liberty to them, or provided for their exemption as conscientious objectors. In 1877 the Minnesota legislature amended the military service law of 1873 so as to exempt conscientious objectors.²² This legislation was no doubt enacted as a result of William Seeger's influence for the special benefit and inducement to Mennonite immigrants. The launching of the Federal draft abruptly ended this feeling of safety and security, and the local Mennonites were face to face with the question of what should be done with this new threat to their liberty. The matter was earnestly discussed at "Bruderschaft" (conference of all the male members) in every church, it was for some time the foremost subject of conversation everywhere in the community, and efforts were made to find a way out of the predicament, for to many of the Mennonites, especially the older people, the principle of non-resistance was a vital part of their faith. Emigration was out of the question for there was no better place to be found because practically the whole world was at war, and it was quite improbable that the government would let them go during the war. All efforts to obtain concessions from the government failed and the matter was finally left for each individual to decide for himself. A few young men who were religiously indifferent were attracted by the prospect of adventure and excitement and volunteered to serve in the military forces, and some of those that were drafted went wherever the military authorities sent them, which was usually to the trenches at the front. Most of them, who were more seriously religious, obeyed the call to service, but refused to serve in the fighting forces, choosing rather to do first aid duty, or other non-combatant work. Some of these young men suffered from mis-treatment by military authorities and fellow-soldiers because they refused to fight, but none of them experienced the extreme and inhuman physical torture and humiliation inflicted on some of the Mennonite boys from other parts of the United States because of their refusal to fight.²³ A few individuals fled to Canada, thus escaping the draft.

21. Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, chs. 1 and 2.

22. *Laws of Minnesota*, 1877, 54.

23. See Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*, the concluding chapter, for a detailed account of the most extreme cases.

In view of the facts just discussed it is not a surprise to find that there was a marked stimulation in religious interest and activity among the local Mennonites.²⁴ The religious beliefs and practices that had become more or less a matter of course to many people were now examined more critically in an effort to determine their real worth. Some people were indifferent and remained so throughout the war, while others saw the futility of religious formalism that had been made the sum and substance of religion when it should be merely the outward expression and accompaniment of an inward life initiated by conversion and motivated by a set purpose to serve God and not to neglect to serve mankind for its best good. Most of the churches experienced an increase in evangelistic activity which led to crises in several churches. In the First Mennonite Church "Aeltester" Jacob Stoesz, the successor to George Neufeld who died in 1916, was removed from office, partly because of the evangelistic emphasis in his preaching. Thereupon he, with his own and about half a dozen other families left the congregation and went to other churches. At about the same time the Bethel, Mennonite Brethren, and Bruderthaler Churches conducted revival meetings that produced a considerable number of conversions, a fact which was rather disquieting and disturbing to those Mennonites who did not believe in conversion and revival meetings. All churches had at least a few such members. The tide of local evangelism reached its climax in the summer of 1920 when several non-Mennonite evangelists conducted revival meetings for two weeks in a large tent located in the village park. Scores of people were converted and there was a great religious stir in the entire community.

From among the converts of these and earlier evangelistic meetings a new church organization developed in the succeeding five years. The society to which the evangelists of the 1920 campaign belonged, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, regularly sent supply pastors to the community after the conclusion of the special meetings to preach to the group of converts on Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons. In the following year the group built a large tabernacle with a seating capacity of over 2000. The purpose of the large structure was to make possible large union meetings of all the local churches at times that would not interfere with their regular services, for the group originally did not intend to establish a separate church. They retained their membership in the churches to which they belonged before 1920, and hoped

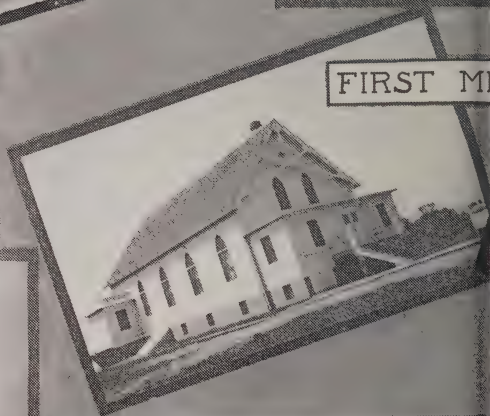
24. The writer is thoroughly familiar with the last two decades of local history through personal experience and observation as a resident of the community.



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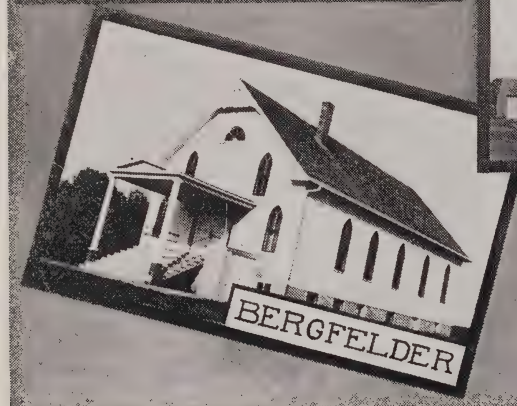
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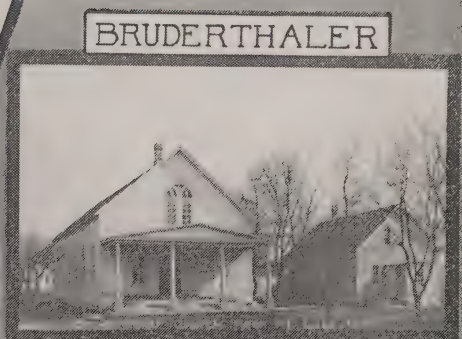
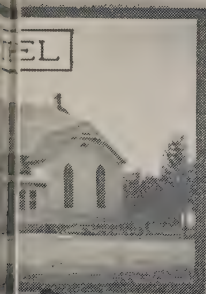


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that the churches would cooperate in a permanent program of local evangelism. The churches vigorously opposed the scheme, and the group decided to form a separate church organization in 1924, with Sunday school, regular Sunday morning and evening services, a Bible class, prayer service, and young people's meeting each week. The new church became a member of the Christain and Missionary Alliance organization. The tabernacle proved to be impractical and was removed in 1937 and a modest, attractive church erected in its stead.

The origin and development of the Alliance Missionary Church closely resembled the origin and early development of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia. Both voiced a vigorous protest against the increasing formalism of the Mennonite religion as exemplified and practiced in the churches of their time and sought to re-vitalize religion by a strong emphasis on evangelism. The local church did not consciously seek to return to the teachings of Menno Simon, but its doctrines and methods closely resembled those of Menno Simon which the early Mennonite Brethren endeavored to revive and restore among the Mennonites in Russia.

For about a decade the Alliance Church met with opposition and persecution from the local Mennonites very much like that endured by the M. B. Church in Russia before 1870, but it was social and psychological in nature without the economic and physical violence that occurred in Russia. The prejudice and opposition of the other churches caused many of the converts to leave the group, consequently it grew slowly in actual numbers. There was, however, another reason for the slow increase in membership. Throughout its history the majority of its young people went away to obtain further education and few of them returned to live in the community, most of them entering into some kind of religious or educational work. In recent years this tendency actually reduced the membership. It is at the present time the smallest church in the community.

The new church was rather strongly opposed by the local Mennonite churches because of its clear emphasis on conversion as an experience essential to becoming a Christian and as a prerequisite for church membership. This evangelistic emphasis not only drew some members away from other churches, but made many Mennonite church members very uncomfortable because among them were many individuals who had never been converted. These non-Christian church members and the leaders who had admitted them to the church were quite resentful when thus ex-

posed and did not conceal their displeasure. At the same time the converted church members found cause for opposition to the new church. Their reason was the teaching of the new church concerning the "deeper Christian life", a teaching which holds that conversion does not, as Mennonites generally believe, comprise the sum-total of Christian experience, but that the Christian must advance beyond conversion to a relationship with God in which he recognizes and accepts Christ as his supreme master. This teaching concerning sanctification was new to most of the Mennonites and they did not receive it because it was not Mennonite in either origin or acceptance. Another reason for opposition to the church was the belief that the new church was superfluous, particularly so because it was of non-Mennonite origin and affiliation, and because it used the American language to the almost complete exclusion of the German language.

As a result of these circumstances the local churches experienced a strong reaction against evangelism and became quite static and conservative spiritually in the sense that they did their utmost to preserve their Mennonite beliefs and traditions as they then existed. The idea of becoming a Mennonite by joining the church was considered more important than to first become a Christian through the experience of conversion. The latter was too much like the teaching of the new church. This change in emphasis has tended to reduce the spiritual vitality of the churches and at the same time to weaken their power to hold the young people and lead them to a genuine knowledge and experience of Christian conversion and living. There has developed a noticeable tendency among local young people to be drawn into the amusements, attractions and activities of modern life that crowd out and contradict vital Christian life and experience, and there is a slowly growing number of "Mennonites" to whom a profession of Christianity in terms of church membership means little or nothing more than that it gives them a respectable social standing in the community or helps them greatly in their business relations.

In some respects the Mountain Lake churches have made considerable progress. The preachers are better educated than they were in the earlier days of the community, and some of them receive salaries so that they are able to devote their full time to the ministry. Church music has improved to a marked degree. All the churches have regular choirs and the old prejudice against the use of instruments in the church has broken down completely. The churches have become more friendly and cooperative in their

relations to each other. In contrast to the pioneer days when the churches were so exclusive and jealous of each other that they would not permit their pastors to exchange pulpits, they have learned to participate in union activities such as Sunday school conventions, Christian Endeavor Conventions, special hospital days, and special meetings for the promotion of local religious education projects. These common activities indicate a considerable degree of progress toward greater toleration and cooperation in religious matters, yet there is no indication that there will ever be a union of all the churches of the community.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN LAKE AS A MENNONITE COMMUNITY

Political, Social, and Cultural History

From the standpoint of political development the community did not undergo any extraordinary changes after the first years of adaptation and adjustment to American conditions had passed. Through most of its history the political phases of community life remained remarkably constant and uniform so that local political history failed to reflect in any meaningful sense the trends in state, national, and world politics.

World affairs aroused their interest mainly when they were in some way affected by them. For example, they were concerned about Russian affairs that affected the Mennonites in that country, especially during and since the World War. There was some anti-British sentiment during the Boer War in South Africa at the turn of the century because of the Dutch and German connections.¹ The Mennonites were not politically minded in the sense that politics was one of their favorite hobbies, as is frequently the case with Americans, and they seldom manifested more than a passive interest in national and state politics. The local Mennonites were invariably Republicans from the time of settlement up to the present. Within recent years, however, a small minority turned to the support of the Roosevelt New Deal, and of the Farmer-Labor party in the state.

This apathy toward the affairs of the political world was in part an outgrowth of the teachings of Menno Simon concerning the Christian's relation to the world and government and the experience of Mennonites as a whole with the governments of the countries where they had lived. Simon taught that the Christian was essentially different from non-Christians and had to maintain a degree of separation within non-Christian society in order to

1. *Unser Besucher*, Dec. 10, 1902.

preserve his faith, but he was to honor and obey, except in matters of conscience, the temporal powers as divinely instituted agencies for the preservation of law and order and to look after the material welfare of society. He was not permitted to use any kind of physical force in resisting the government, especially not in religious persecution, but to suffer patiently for the sake of his faith and leave the matter of judgment and vengeance in the hands of God.² For several centuries from Simon's time onward the Mennonites found the governments under which they lived either indifferent, or unfriendly, or openly hostile to them, and it was natural for them to conclude that it was sin for them to be identified with them by holding political office or taking any active part in government administration. In Russia the paradoxical situation of the democratic colonies existing under an autocratic regime did not tend to develop any antipathy among the Mennonites toward government, but it fostered indifference toward affairs and politics that were not local. The unusual degree of local autonomy granted them by their charters made the relationship between the Imperial Government and the individual Mennonites so remote that the latter had little incentive or occasion to be interested or take an active part in national or even provincial affairs. In view of this background it was not to be expected that the Mennonites who came to Mountain Lake would be very active politically. Many of the pioneers believed that it was wrong for them to hold office, they did not care to vote, and some of them did not want to become American citizens until they discovered that they could not acquire government land unless they took out citizenship papers. It was a new experience for them to live under a national government that was democratic rather than autocratic. Their natural conservatism, the strangeness of the language of the land, and their traditional background were important factors that retarded the development of interest in national politics. As their economic status improved, as education developed and increased the knowledge and use of the American language, and as they became more familiar with their American environment they slowly developed interests that included more than just the community. Not only did they learn to vote in the elections, some of the more ambitious individuals ran for office and were elected. The first Mennonite county official was I. I. Borgen who served as County Superintendent of schools from 1892 to 1901. Since that time various Mennonites have held different county offices and a few have served as members of the state legislature.³

2. Krahn, *Menno Simons*, 161-176.

3. Rempel chronicle.

The Mennonites were much less conservative in regard to local government and politics, for they took over the affairs of village and township government as soon as they were settled in the community. They could hardly avoid doing so because of the compactness of the Mennonite population and the very small minority of Americans living among them, and it was obvious that their interests would be served best if they controlled the local units of government.

They were quite well fitted for the control and administration of local government because of their experience in local democratic government in Russia, where the Mennonites were granted complete control of all phases of local administration. They had their own courts, and local officials, they levied their own taxes for the support of the local government, schools, churches and charitable institutions, made their own laws, built their own roads, and controlled all economic interests within their colonies. It was a comparatively simple matter for them to adapt themselves to the conditions and methods of local government in America.

From the time of its separate organization as a municipality in 1886 the village of Mountain Lake was governed by Mennonite officials with the exception of the constable who was usually an American. In recent years, particularly since the World War, village politics rapidly developed into a more typically American set-up. A younger set of local business men and politicians developed the semblance of a political machine that functioned to a large extent through the local commercial club which is the strongest civic organization in the community. A considerable number of individuals in this group are not orthodox Mennonites although they are of Mennonite descent and are usually members of Mennonite churches. They have become typically American in their general outlook on life, social habits and customs, and attitudes toward religion and morality to the extent that Mountain Lake is becoming more and more like the usual type of American small town.

The Mennonites proved to be good citizens for they were law abiding, industrious, and conservatively progressive in their general mode of life. When they were entrusted with public office, they executed their duties honestly and with reasonable efficiency. Gross crimes, immorality, divorce, and marital unfaithfulness were not unknown among them, but they occurred infrequently. Now and then a Mennonite turned out to be a person of low character, lax church members sometimes stooped to petty wrong-doing, and

occasionally some of the young people went wrong, but on the whole the Mennonites maintained a high moral standard in public and private life, faithfully executing their financial, legal, and civic responsibilities.

The development of education in the Mountain Lake community was very decidedly influenced by the educational tradition that the Mennonites had developed during their two and a half generations of residence in Russia. Their charter of privileges granted to them complete control of education among themselves with no restrictions imposed by the Imperial Government. They could decide for themselves whether they should have schools or not; they could determine for themselves what should be taught and how it should be taught; and they could support and regulate their schools as they saw fit. By 1870 each village had its independent elementary school which was attended by all the children of the community and was supported either by local taxes, or by tuition paid by the parents. The curriculum was very simple, consisting mainly of reading, writing, and arithmetic plus training in the tenets of the Mennonite faith. The Bible was the main textbook for reading as well as for religious instruction. In addition to these elementary schools some of the more progressive communities had begun to develop secondary schools which usually provided training for school teachers.⁴ These schools were fashioned after the German model, but they were not as good as the latter. They were more democratic, however, and made the Mennonites practically one hundred percent literate.

Upon their arrival in Minnesota the Mennonites found that the state had already established a system of public schools which the people were required to support and maintain. The American pioneers had already organized school districts in the community and a school was in operation in the village of Mountain Lake. As the Mennonites took possession of the community they became responsible for the maintenance of public education in the area, but they were not favorably disposed toward American public education because it did not meet their particular needs and desires. Their principal objection was the fact that the state excluded all religious instruction from the public schools. Closely linked to this objection was the requirement that no foreign language could be used as the language of instruction. To the Mennonite pioneers religious instruction was the "*raison d'être*" for education and they were not willing to give it up without a struggle. The German language was so closely interwoven with their religion and

4. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, 1:569-653.

their general mode of life that they believed that their faith would face extinction if they had to give up that language. They were thus faced with the difficult problem of perpetuating their faith and their language outside of an educational system that excluded both of them.

The only way out of the situation was the establishment and maintenance of a dual system of public and private schools, for the law compelled the support of the former and their own desire forbade the neglect of the latter. In the early pioneer days their poverty made this extremely difficult, but they were determined to have the education they wanted and succeeded in obtaining what they desired. In order to satisfy the law the children were sent to the public school the minimum number of days, which was only thirty days in the early pioneer years. The children profited little from the instruction of those short school terms because of the antagonistic attitude of the Mennonites toward American secular education, which was flatly condemned by the most conservative men among them. At the time of their immigration the Mountain Lake school district, No. 9, consisted of the three entire townships of Mountain Lake, Midway, and Carson plus a considerable portion of Lakeside township,⁵ an area which included practically all of the Mennonite settlers in Cottonwood County. Although the Mennonites were very penurious in their support of the public schools, it became necessary to erect a new school building in the village (1881), and to reduce the size of the district by carving out of it new districts which established their own country schools. Pioneers say that the school houses of that time were so poor in construction and equipment that modern farmers would not consider them fit for farm livestock.

Under these conditions the progress of public education was very slow and halting, but it was not destined to remain thus indefinitely. Leaders arose among the Mennonites who took an active interest in the development and progress of the public schools of the community. Some of the business men in the village recognized the value of secular education and contributed greatly to the improvement of the local school. Heinrich Dickman, John Janzen, Peter Goossen,⁶ and H. P. Goertz were some of the early leaders who urged the people on to better support of the school and gave their active support to the younger men who came to positions of leadership after 1885 and served the cause of education in profess-

5. I. I. Barga, "Unsere Öffentliche Schulen", *Jubiläumsfeier*, 35-37.

6. *Ibid.*

ional capacities as teachers or public officials. The outstanding young Mennonite pioneer educators of this type were I. I. Bargaen and J. J. Balzer. Bargaen, who came to the community from Russia in 1878, had received sufficient education in his old home to qualify for the teaching profession. Upon his arrival he taught a private school in Bergthal for two years, and then sought further training to qualify for public school teaching. Balzer came to Mountain Lake with his parents in 1877 and four years later became the first Mennonite to leave the community for the purpose of obtaining higher education, going to a German college at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. In 1885 Balzer and Bargaen were engaged by the village school board to conduct the local school. They worked together for about four years and through their youthful energy and initiative stimulated the people to greater interest and support for public education. In 1892 Bargaen became superintendent of the Mountain Lake public school, which position he held until 1901. At the same time he also held the position of superintendent of the public schools of the county. In the latter office he was succeeded by another Mennonite, John J. Koehn, who served for four years. The leadership of these young Mennonites, the improvement of economic conditions, and the slowly mounting confidence in and appreciation of public education resulted in the gradual advancement of public education throughout the community. Concrete evidence of this fact appeared in 1908 when the village erected a large three-story brick school building with full basement that was at that time the best school structure in the county.

An important phase of the development of the village school was the introduction of the first high school course in 1900. The first high school graduates received their diplomas in 1908. The establishment and growth of the secondary division of the local school was to a large extent induced by the steadily mounting interest in higher education among the young people. Balzer's example in going away to school in 1881 was followed within the next few years by John P. Rempel who went to the same school in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, H. H. Regier who went to a seminary at Rochester, New York, and Herman J. Fast who attended the normal school at Mankato, Minnesota.⁷ In the nineties local young people began to go to the newly-founded Mennonite institution, Bethel College, at Newton, Kansas. After 1900 the number of students going to this and other higher institutions steadily increased and with that increase came a stronger demand for the necessary college prep-

7. Rempel chronicle.

aration. Some of those who obtained higher education came back to the community and served as teachers, preachers, or businessmen, thereby stimulating greater interest in education on all levels. By the time of the World War the old antagonism toward American public education had largely subsided, except among the older people who were loath to give up their traditional beliefs, and most of the people willingly gave moral as well as material support to their public schools.

In the meantime local private education attained a high degree of development that reached its climax in the World War decade. In spite of the fact that the Mennonites were so anxious to give their children a German religious education, it was impossible for them to make very rapid progress before 1890 because of the economic difficulties and hardships of those pioneer years. Money was so scarce that they could not build the necessary schools or support the needed teachers. But the demand for and interest in such education was so strong that individual initiative and resourcefulness largely made up for the lack of economic means and organized effort. Beginning in 1876 interested individuals in all parts of the Mennonite settlement organized in their homes private schools for the instruction of the children of their neighborhood. Most of these pioneer schoolmasters were farmers whose intense interest in the perpetuation of the Mennonite faith and the preservation of the German language caused them to conduct these schools for little or no remuneration. Frequently the children lived in the teacher's home during the week, going home only for Saturday and Sunday. The best known of these schoolmasters was Johann Becker⁸ who lived on a farm about six miles southeast of the village of Mountain Lake. He came from Russia as an experienced teacher in 1878 and immediately started a school which he continued until a few months before his death in 1895. He taught as many as fifteen boarding students at one time, besides supporting a family of ten children, and serving as preacher in one of the Mennonite churches for eleven out of the sixteen and a half years of teaching. Each pupil paid him one dollar a month tuition and ten cents a day for his keep.⁹ Altogether there were about fifteen different individuals who conducted similar schools.

In the materials and methods of instruction these schools were modeled after the village schools in Russia. All instruction was carried on in the German language. The children were taught to

8. Johann Becker was the writer of the diary described in the bibliography.

9. J. J. Becker. "Die Ankunft hier", *Jubilaumsfeier*, 10-15.

read, write, and spell, and to do simple arithmetic. The rest of the instruction consisted of Bible reading and explanations of the readings by the teacher. Discipline and order were strictly enforced according to the Prussian tradition. The school term lasted about four months, beginning in November or December. These schools furnished the only opportunity for private education before 1880. They were vastly inferior to the schools of the present day, but they were as good or better than the country schools that existed at that time, according to the statements of the pioneers.

The local development of private education was distinctly affected in the nineties by the marked improvement of local economic conditions, for the availability of the material means that were lacking in the earlier years made possible organized effort for the provision of better private educational opportunities. In 1893 the Bruderthaler Church organized its own parochial school, and in 1896 built a three-story school building with dormitory facilities and living quarters for the teacher and his family. In the latter year the First Mennonite Church at Bergthol erected a similar school building on the church grounds. In 1901 J. J. Balzer, who turned to private education in 1891 and taught a private school in the village from that time on, organized a German school society which built a two story school building with four large class rooms and full basement in the northern part of the village. All of these schools were quite successful for many years, for they were well attended, especially the Mountain Lake school, which was commonly known as the German school. Under Balzer's able leadership the enrolment increased to the point where three full time teachers were required to do the teaching. The curriculum and the range of education offered grew until it included all the regular eight grades and some of the high school subjects. The forenoon hours of each school day were devoted to German instruction and religious instruction and the afternoons were devoted to the study of the regular courses and subjects offered in the public schools so that the pupils who finished the eighth grade in the German school could enter the public high school. For a time the school even drew a dozen or so of students each year from Mennonite settlements outside of Minnesota, chiefly from Mennonite communities in South Dakota. Organized local private education as exemplified by these three schools reached the height of its development during the World War years, mainly before the United States entered the war. After the close of the war local interest and support for private education declined very rapidly. By 1925 the Bergthol and the Bruderthaler schools were closed and the German

school in Mountain Lake experienced a rapid falling off in its attendance. The latter school is still subsisting precariously despite the fact that the local churches are responsible for its maintenance, having taken over the school in 1912 from the hands of the private school society originally founded by Balzer. At the present time the enrolment is less than forty and the teacher receives a very meager salary. The regular course has been reduced to include only grades one to six, and a special Bible course is offered for the benefit of older students. The latter seems to be quite successful.

The decline of German religious education resulted partly from the weakening of religious life in the community. The small but growing minority of local individuals who were either indifferent or opposed to religion cared not a whit for religious education. In the ranks of the church members increasing numbers of individuals were religiously indifferent or so vague in their beliefs that they could not determine what should be taught in religious schools and were therefore of little help to religious education. The most important factor, however, was the influence of the public schools. Many people objected to the double cost of education when they sent their children to private schools, and so fewer and fewer parents were willing to pay tuition to one school while supporting the other with taxes. Further the public schools have brought about the gradual displacement of the German language by the American language, especially so since the World War. The majority of the young people who were born within the last two decades prefer to use the American language in everyday life, and a few of them hardly know the German well enough to use it. Another factor that contributed to the decline of local religious education was the fact that the young people who wanted advanced religious training in recent years preferred to attend the public schools and then go away to Bible schools, seminaries, or Christian colleges.

Since the World War the local public schools progressed quite rapidly, in much the same way that American public education has improved and advanced during this time. The public school system in the village of Mountain Lake was enlarged twice within the last twenty years and is now in need of more space and equipment to accommodate the increasing number of students. The system now includes an elementary division beginning with the first grade, a junior high school consisting of grades seven to nine, and a senior high school consisting of grades ten to

twelve. There is nothing about the school system that distinctly marks it as a Mennonite public school system, and it is doubtful whether a casual observer would find it to differ in any marked manner from the typical American community school system. All the teachers are from outside of the community as a matter of established local custom and policy. The pupils themselves differ little from the school children of average American communities, but a careful observer would discover the presence of a flat German accent in the speech of some of the pupils. This, however, is rapidly disappearing. The superintendent and the school board are moderately progressive in adapting and changing the system to meet new needs and conditions. Most of the country school districts of the community have fairly modern school buildings and equipment, conduct school for eight months in the year, and pay their teachers fairly good salaries.

On the whole the Mountain Lake Mennonites are rather favorably disposed toward education, for not only do they take pride in the maintenance and support of their schools, but they show great interest in higher education. At the present time over fifty young people annually leave the community to attend various institutions of learning in different parts of the United States. A considerable proportion of those who obtain further education enter the teaching profession while others become ministers, missionaries, doctors, lawyers, and nurses, or enter other professions or vocations.

The social customs and habits that the local Mennonites brought along from Russia constituted a peculiar pattern that showed the influence of all the countries that were directly connected with their past history, namely, Holland, Germany, and Russia. The purely Russian influence, however, was relatively small because of the fact that the Mennonites lived in closed settlements that largely kept them from direct contact with the Russian masses. During the two generations of life in America the pattern has become more complex because of the discontinuance or modification of old customs, and the adoption of new ones.

One of the dominant traits of the Mennonites as a group at the time of their coming to America was their exclusiveness or clannishness. Strangers found it very difficult to approach them, to get acquainted with them, and to win their confidence. This attitude of aloofness was acquired by them during their long stay in Russia where they not only remained separated from the native population, but actually developed an aristocratic superiority com-

plex, believing that they were above the illiterate Russians in almost every respect. Socially they refused to have anything to do with the native Russians. The native servants employed by the wealthy farmers had to eat in the kitchen and sleep in the barn. In America they soon discovered that the Americans were their equals or superiors in many respects and that they could not regard them in the same manner as they did the Russian serfs and peasants. Nevertheless, they remained socially aloof from all non-Mennonites, mainly because of their religion. Inter-marriage was considered wrong and out of the question for good Mennonites. Many parents were very reluctant to permit their children to attend the same school with the children of non-Mennonites, and before the establishment of the Mennonite Bethel College in Kansas comparatively few Mennonites went away for higher education because they had to go to non-Mennonite schools.

Even among themselves there was considerable clannishness based either on family relationships or on church connections. Families or groups of related families sometimes developed the notion that they were better than the rest and became rather selective in their associations with other families. Then again other families fell into general disfavor and were socially boycotted by the rest. Sometimes the latter occurred in connection with religious difficulties. The churches were quite clannish and exclusive in the early pioneer days. The preachers of the different churches were not permitted to exchange pulpits, nor were they allowed to marry couples unless both parties belonged to his church. The relations between families and individuals of different churches were strongly influenced by these attitudes based on small differences of opinion on non-essential religious questions.

The Mennonites have not wholly shed their clannishness, but they are much less clannish than they were two generations ago. Today many of them associate quite freely with non-Mennonites in practically all phases of life. Inter-marriages are quite common, business partnerships are not unusual, and attitudes of superiority based on religious beliefs are gradually disappearing. The vast changes that developed in the years since the World War greatly influenced the Mennonites, especially the improvement of the means of communication and transportation which brought them into closer contact with the influences of the American people and their ways of life.

In Russia the social relations among the Mennonites were very intimate, especially in the villages where all the families of the community lived together as close neighbors. In this country the fact that the families lived on their individual farms, rather than grouped together in villages as in Russia, tended to make social contact less intimate and frequent, especially in the days when means of transportation and communication were slow and difficult, and they had to make special efforts to keep in touch with their friends and relatives. It became customary for family groups to meet for family reunions at certain times of the year, chiefly at Christmas and at Easter. The grand parents were usually the hosts for these occasions. Sunday afternoons and evenings were spent by the people in visiting. Usually each family went as a unit to spend the afternoon or evening with another family, but the older children sometimes pursued their own interests. The afternoon visits included an afternoon lunch, locally known as "vesper", consisting of coffee, "Zwieback", and cake or cookies, which was served at four o'clock. Weddings usually took place in the church and all the church members or even all the people of the community were invited. Married couples celebrated their twentyfifth and fiftieth wedding anniversaries by inviting all the members of the church to the church for a service after which they served a meal to all the guests in the church dining hall. In connection with funerals, which were commonly conducted in the church, it was customary to serve a lunch to all those who attended. Every church observed an annual occasion known as children's day which had some social features connected with it. The time for this occasion was the Fourth of July or the preceding Sunday, and the whole day was devoted to it. At noon and after the afternoon service meals were served to all the people in the church dining hall. Many of these social practices still remain unchanged, while others were modified or discontinued. Family reunions are not as frequent or common as they were in earlier days. Weddings are more exclusive and less like community affairs to which everyone is invited, and more frequently take place in the home rather than in the church. The practice of serving meals after funeral services is gradually disappearing.

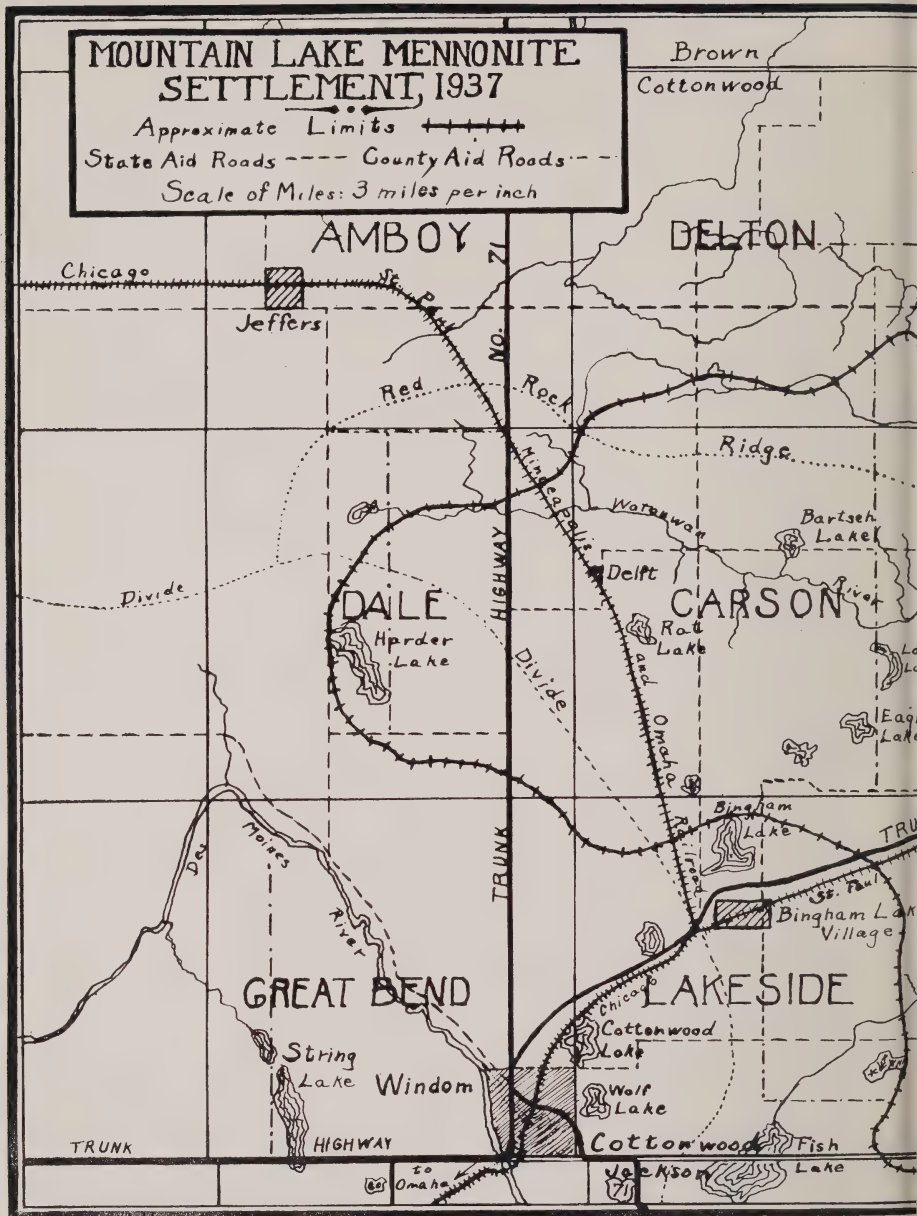
In recent years many common American social activities and practices have become established in the community. The local weekly newspaper, the *Mountain Lake Observer*, contains a social column with a dozen or more items each week concerning parties, dinner invitations, club meetings, and other typically American social affairs. Each year the local commercial club sponsors a community

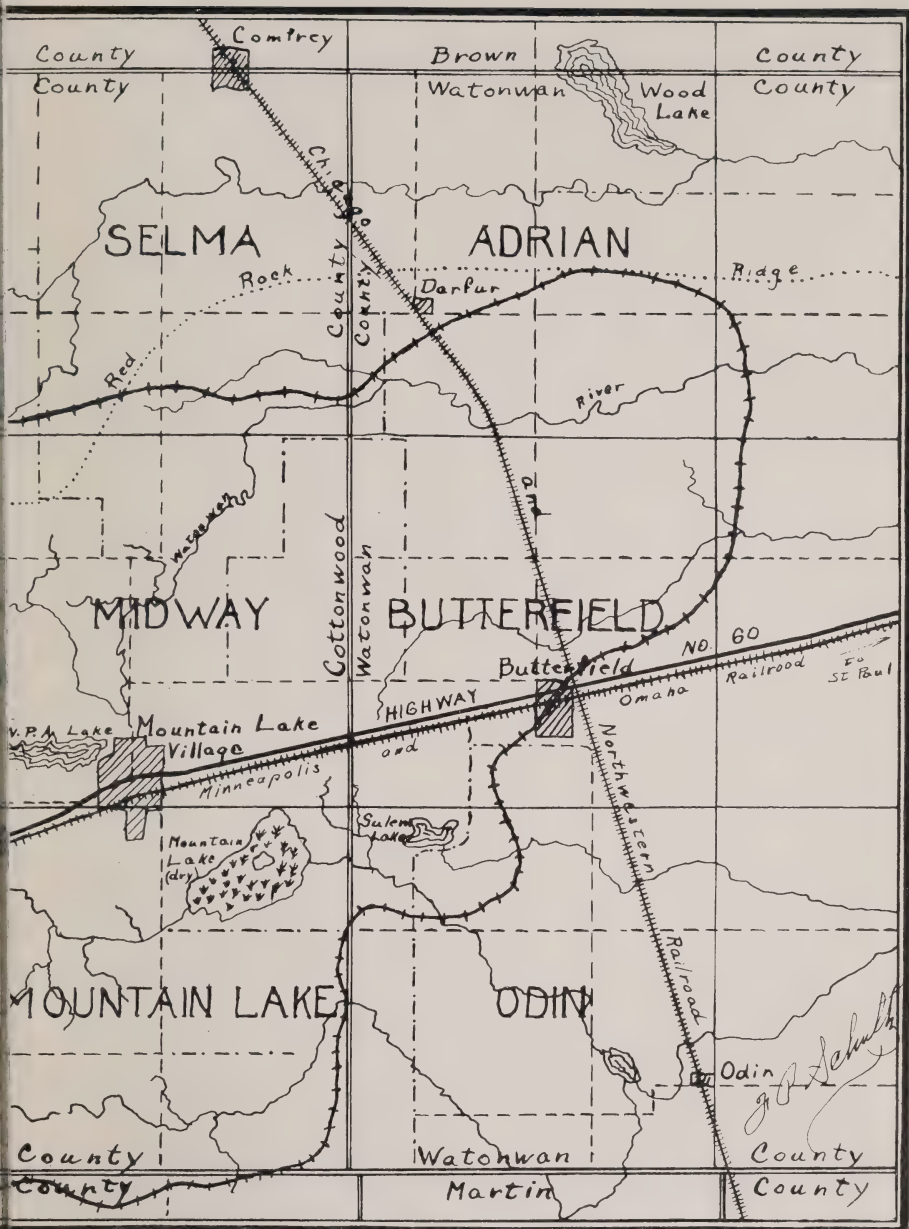
MOUNTAIN LAKE MENNONITE SETTLEMENT, 1937

Approximate Limits ++++++

State Aid Roads ---- County Aid Roads ----

Scale of Miles: 3 miles per inch





celebration known as the "Pow-Wow" which has some of the good and many of the bad features of a typical community fair. The community has not yet developed the common American type of "night life" with its combination of dancing, drinking, smoking, late hours, etc., but there are some tendencies in that direction. Since repeal the village has acquired its full share of "beer joints" with their bright neon signs lighting up the streets at night. Most of these places and one of the two local pool halls are operated by "Mennonites" and appear to be financially successful. An increasing number of young people become habitual users of tobacco. Several of the churches, all of which were formerly opposed to the smoking habit, no longer object when some of their members smoke outside of the church door, or even sing in the choir with tobacco odor on their breath and tobacco in their pockets. The great majority of local Mennonites still regard dancing as wrong and there are few in the community who have learned to dance. There is no public dance hall in the community, so those who want to dance have to go elsewhere for that purpose.

When the Mennonite immigrants came to the community they wore the forms of dress that they habitually used in Russia in their closed colonies, but their style of dress had no religious significance, as was the case with certain other branches and sects of Mennonites. Some of the people, however, believed that the women should wear some kind of head covering in the church services, while others believed that it was wrong to wear jewelry or any kind of ornaments. After the clothes which they brought from Russia wore out they acquired American clothes and generally followed the fashions of the times. The women wore hoop skirts when those were in style, and usually made up their hair in the prevailing fashion. There was a great deal of opposition to bobbed hair for some time, but the style is today accepted, although it is not as prevalent among the older women as in American communities. A public gathering of Mennonite people looks just like groups of people in other agricultural communities in America, with the exception that Mennonite women as a rule use cosmetics very sparingly or not at all.

The cultural interests of the Mennonites at Mountain Lake have never been very numerous or extensive. The development of local education has already been discussed in this chapter. Throughout the two generations of time that the Mennonites have lived in America, they were so completely absorbed with the economic and religious aspects of life that they had little time or

inclination to devote themselves to the finer arts. The community has not produced any artists of note in music, letters, or any of the other branches of the fine arts, but in some of these lines achievements have been made that are worthy of mention. Music is today one of the important interests of the people of the community. Mention was made in a previous chapter of the poor character of the church music in the early pioneer days. Since that time the singing in the churches has vastly improved. Practically every individual in the community can sing one of the four parts in ordinary hymns, so the congregational singing is usually much better than that of the average American church. Today practically every one of the local churches has a regular choir and may also have a male chorus, a womens' chorus, and sometimes junior choirs. Nearly every year the choirs of all the churches combine to form a community choir for the presentation of a special concert, or to sing on special occasions such as the annual hospital day, the Christian Endeavor convention, or the annual Sunday School convention. It is customary for everyone to learn to sing regardless of how good or poor the voice may be, and nearly everyone takes great pleasure in singing or in listening to performances. Instrumental music has not reached as high a stage of development, but it is making rapid progress. About fifteen to twenty years ago local talent produced a town band that was rated as one of the best organizations in the region. Within the last ten years public school music has made great strides in both the instrumental and the vocal fields. Mountain Lake is widely known for the excellent groups that enter the district and state public school music contests each year. The school band, which is at least average or above now, is rapidly improving.

The cultural interests of the Mennonites are gradually broadening as a result of the influence of education, travel, current literature, the radio, and other important phases of modern life. so that the community is slowly becoming less and less distinctly Mennonite and more and more like the average agricultural community of the Middle West. Even today the passing traveler would hardly notice any striking difference between this and the other communities through which he chanced to travel. He would need to stop for some time to get acquainted with the people to realize that Mountain Lake is the home of Mennonites.

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PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

A considerable amount of invaluable information was obtained by the writer directly from the aged Mennonite pioneers of the Mountain Lake community who were in most cases born in Russia and came to Minnesota at the time of the Great Migration of 1873 to 1880. Additional information was secured from non-Mennonite pioneers who now reside elsewhere but who were associated in various ways with the local Mennonites at the time of their immigration or during the pioneer days of the community. Below follow the names of the pioneers interviewed with brief biographical sketches and the dates of the interviews.

BALZER, J. J. Date of interview: March 23, 1936

Mr. Balzer was born in 1860 in the village of Gnadenfeld, Russia. His father, who was a farmer, moved to Minnesota with his family in 1877 and located on a farm about four miles northeast of the village. In 1881 he attended a German college at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, to prepare for the ministry. From 1885 on he devoted all his time and energy to the ministry and the teaching profession in the local community, but he also traveled a great deal in other Mennonite settlements as preacher and evangelist and for a time was engaged in private educational work among the Mennonites in Manitoba, Canada. At the present time he lives in retirement at Mountain Lake.

BECKER, ABRAM J. Date of interview: March 24, 1936

Mr. Becker's parents came from Russia in 1878 and located on a farm about six miles southeast of Mountain Lake, where his father, Johann Becker, conducted a private religious school in his home until 1894. The latter was the author of a diary described elsewhere in the bibliography. The son followed in the footsteps of his father and devoted most of his life to teaching in various private schools in the community. At the present time he lives in retirement at Mountain Lake.

FAST, HERMAN J.

Date of interview: March 23, 1936

Mr. Fast was born in the village of Gertemale, Russia, in 1860 and came to this country with his parents in 1875. He attended the normal school at Mankato, Minnesota, from 1882 to 1884 and then taught school for a year or two. In 1886 he married Aganetha Becker, daughter of Johann Becker and sister to Abram J. Becker, and settled on a farm about four miles southeast of Mountain Lake. Besides being a successful farmer he held numerous offices of trust and responsibility, such as secretary of the Mountain Lake township board (for twenty-five years), president of the Cooperative Farmers Elevator Association (for thirty-six years), and various offices in the local Bethel Church. He is now living in retirement at Mountain Lake.

WIENS, PETER C.

Date of interview: March 28, 1936

Mr. Wiens was born in Nikolaidorf, Russia, in 1855 and came to this country with his parents, Rev. and Mrs. Jacob Wiens, in 1875. Besides being a successful farmer and thresher he found time to serve as county commissioner, secretary of the district school board in the western part of Carson township, superintendent of the Sunday school in the Carson Mennonite Brethren Church, and secretary and historian of the same church. He is the author of a diary which is described elsewhere in the bibliography. At the present time he is living in retirement at Mountain Lake.

PENNER, ABRAM

Date of interview: March 24, 1936

Mr. Penner was born in Bergthal, Russia, in 1848 and came to Mountain Lake with his parents in 1875 after spending a very disappointing winter in Manitoba, Canada. Instead of becoming a farmer, as his father did, he chose to go into business in the village, and engaged in various commercial enterprises until he retired to his present home in the village.

BARGEN, I. I.

Date of interview: March 23, 1936

Mr. Bargaen was born in Alexanderwohl, Russia, in 1856 and came to Mountain Lake in 1878. He immediately entered the teaching profession, teaching first in local private schools and then in the public schools of Mountain Lake. After serving for some years as superintendent of the Mountain Lake school and of the county schools he became the publisher and editor of the *Mountain Lake View*. He also founded, edited, and published a German weekly newspaper with the name, *Unser Besucher*. Until recently he also served as the local postmaster. He now lives in retirement at Mountain Lake.

PETERS, AARON C.

Date of interview: June 26, 1937

Mr. Peters was born in Russia in 1865 and came with his parents from their home in the Crimean Peninsula to this community in 1873. He lived with his parents on their farm northeast of Mountain Lake until he was old enough to farm for himself. Since his retirement from the farm he has resided in the village and operated a paint and wallpaper shop.

SCHULTZ, ISAAC D.

Date of interview: March 24, 1936

Mr. Schultz (an uncle of the writer) was born in Waldheim, Russia, in 1872 and came to Mountain Lake with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. David Schultz, after spending a severe winter in the vicinity of Yankton, South Dakota. After spending most of his life on the farm he retired recently to his present home in Mountain Lake.

GILLAM, E. E.

Date of interview: March 27, 1936

Mr. Gillam came to Cottonwood County as a small boy with his father who homesteaded near the southern shore of Cottonwood Lake not far from the present site of Windom. He became rather well acquainted with the Mennonites, for they usually passed by his father's farm on their business trips to Windom, where many of them traded at his older brother's implement shop. He also became a business man in Windom at an early age and had personal dealings with Mennonites. He is still living in Windom where he operates a music store.

SEEGER, JOHN A.

Date of interview: June 3, 1937

Mr. Seeger was the youngest son of William Seeger, Sr., who was instrumental in bringing the first Mennonite settlers to Mountain Lake. He came to the community with his father in 1875 and was active there for several years as a contractor and carpenter, building houses and barns for the Mennonite farmers. For many years he was connected with the well known business firm, the Seeger Refrigerator Company of St. Paul, Minnesota. He was the president of this firm when he died, August 28, 1938.

KENNEDY, T. W.

Date of interview: June 3, 1937

Mr. Kennedy recently retired from his position as general Manager of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railroad and is now voluntarily serving as the director of the company's historical museum which he founded. He became acquainted with the Mennonites as an official of the railroad company, especially so when he was assistant superintendent for the company at

St. James, a point on the railroad about twelve miles east of Mountain Lake. He kindly granted the writer free access to several useful sources found in the company's archives.

The writer has in his possession written notes for each one of these interviews made at the time the interviews took place. A great deal of valuable information was also obtained through informal conversations with many local Mennonite pioneers who were born in the community within a few years after the last groups of Mennonite immigrants arrived. The writer's parents, Mr. and Mrs. D. D. Schultz, were especially helpful in this manner.

UNPUBLISHED LOCAL DOCUMENTS

REMPEL, JOHN P. A chronicle record of local historical data

John P. Rempel was born in Russia in 1857, and came to live in the village in 1875. Being greatly interested in education he taught himself the American language and went to the normal school in Mankato, Minnesota, in 1881-2. In 1883 he went to a German college at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, where he finished the liberal arts course in 1886, and was an outstanding student in history, language, and philosophy. He returned to the community and plied the building trades as mason and carpenter which brought him in close touch with the people of the community, enabling him to gather a great amount of information about all phases of local history. At the same time he was quite active in religious work, especially in Sunday school work. He also preached occasionally. He served as the village justice of the peace for twenty-five years. He died in 1933.

Rempel devoted a considerable share of his spare time to the gathering and recording of data concerning past and contemporary history of the local community. He recorded his data in three books. The original book was a large red-backed ledger volume of 500 pages size 13 by 8 inches. The second was a similar ledger that was about half as large as the first one. The third book was originally a commercial labor record book, about 8 by 10 inches in size, which Rempel adapted for his purpose.

The information recorded in these books consists largely of a mass of concise factual items classified under a wide variety of topics or heads, such as immigration, emigration, education, weddings and wedding anniversaries, births, deaths, and others. Now and then an expository paragraph is inserted between sections. Practically all of the material is written in German script with occasional words or sentences in the American language.

The books, which are in a very good state of preservation, are in the possession of Rempel's daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. H. R. Quiring of Mountain Lake. The Minnesota Historical Society owns a micro-film copy of the chronicle.

BECKER, JOHANN

A diary

Johann Becker was born in Russia (probably about 1850), and came to Minnesota with his wife and children in 1878. During the winter months of each year he conducted a private religious boarding school on his farm six miles southeast of the village until his death early in 1895. For eleven years of this time he also served as one of the preachers in the Wall Church and later in the Bruderthaler Church.

The diary consists of four books. The first three are home-made booklets size 5 by 8 inches with 76, 48, and 84 pages respectively. The last book is a commercial notebook size 6 by 11 inches with 144 ruled pages.

The daily entries average about thirty words in length and deal with the events of the day with regular references to the weather. There are no references to other than family affairs. The diary covers the period of time from January, 1881, to March 22, 1900. After the father's death in 1895 the entries were made by different members of the family. The entire diary was very closely but legibly written in German script.

The original document is in the possession of a son, John J. Becker, who lives at Mountain Lake. The Minnesota Historical Society owns a complete micro-film copy of the same.

FAST, MRS. HERMAN J. (nee AGANETHA BECKER)

A diary

Aganetha Becker was the daughter of Johann Becker whose diary was described above. She was born in Russia (probably in 1868), and came to Mountain Lake with her parents in 1878. In 1886 she was married to Herman J. Fast. They settled on a farm

four miles' southeast of Mountain Lake where they lived for about thirty years, and then moved to Mountain Lake. She died January 3, 1930.

She began to keep her diary at the time of her marriage in 1886 and continued it regularly until 1920. The first part of the diary up to March 4, 1916, was not available, having been lost or mislaid. The book containing the entries for March 5, 1916, to September 30, 1920, is a large grey red-backed ledger volume size 8 by 13 inches with about 500 pages.

The daily entries contain about fifty to eighty words each and deal with the daily affairs and activities of the family. There are occasional comments on other subjects.

The diary is in the possession of Mrs. Fast's husband, Mr. Herman J. Fast. The Minnesota Historical Society owns a micro-film copy of the part of the diary that was available.

WIENS, PETER C. A diary

Peter Wiens began to keep his diary in 1883 and is still writing daily entries. At the present time the diary consists of about twelve commercial notebooks size 5 by 11 inches with about 144 pages each. It is written in German script which is readily legible. The daily entries are quite brief, consisting of about fifteen to twenty words each, and deal mainly with the personal activities of the diarist with a daily reference to weather conditions.

WIENS, PETER C. A history of the local Mennonite Brethren Church

At the request of the church Mr. Wiens wrote this account of the origin and development of the church some years ago. Since that time he has regularly made additions to the record. It is written in German script in a ledger about 7 by 9 inches in size.

JANZEN, CORNELIUS A Chronicle

Cornelius Janzen was born in Russia (probably about 1841) where he began to farm in 1862. He came with his family to America in 1878 and located on a farm just outside the southeastern limits of Mountain Lake. In 1900 he retired to the village where he lived until his death in 1914.

The document consists of one home-made booklet of 62 pages size 5 by 8 inches. It contains a summary for each year dealing with weather conditions, crop yields, and the business and finan-

cial affairs connected with the farm. Janzen began the chronicle in Russia in 1862 and continued it until 1914 shortly before his death. It was written in German script. Besides the regular annual entries, it contains a full account of the emigrant journey from Russia to Mountain Lake.

The original document is in the possession of his daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Toews. The Minnesota Historical Society owns a micro-film as well as a typewritten copy of the chronicle. The writer also owns a typewritten copy of the same.

RECORDS OF THE SCHULTZ FAMILY

These records consist of about two dozen documents dealing with the history of the family from the middle of the eighteenth century to the present. The oldest document is a family register written by Georg Schultz who was born in the lower Vistula region of Prussia in 1768. He was the writer's great-great grandfather. It became a family tradition for each father to make a similar register of all the members of his immediate family, giving the names and the dates of birth, baptism, and marriage for each individual. Heinrich Schultz, the son of Georg Schultz, moved to Russia with the Mennonites early in the nineteenth century and in 1875 brought his entire family to Mountain Lake.

Most of the original documents are in the possession of Miss Anne J. Schultz at Mountain Lake. Professor Henry D. Schultz of Berea College, Berea, Kentucky, owns copies of most of them, and the writer has copies of a few.

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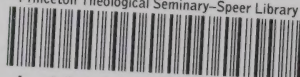
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